UNHEARD AND UNSEEN: BLACK FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS
"WE'RE HERE TOO."

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ABSTRACT

DOOLEY, MARY E. Unheard and Unseen: The Black Female Experience in the North Carolina Schools. "We're Here Too."
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This exploratory qualitative research study was designed to explore the academic experiences of Black female adolescents attending schools in North Carolina schools. In addition to considering the role that racial identity, parental socialization (i.e., racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization), and school connectedness play in these academic experiences, using Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies lenses, this study investigated the ways in which Black female adolescents' academic experiences in the North Carolina school system are impacted by: (a) the relationships they share with their teachers, peers, and other school personnel; (b) the curriculum, and (c) white supremacy. To explore these experiences, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine Black female adolescent rising high school seniors. The participants answered questions in order to learn more about the experiences in and perceptions of their time in the North Carolina school system. Three main themes emerged from the participants responses: (1) white supremacy, (2) intersectionality, and (3) resilience and strength. The development of interventions, programs, and professional development for better supporting Black female students may be assisted by the perspectives and themes found in this study. Implications for practice and future research are included.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Statewide and nationally, zero-tolerance and punitive discipline policies disproportionally impact students of Color (Dumas, 2014; Morris, 2013). Exclusionary discipline, where students are removed from the classroom as a consequence, continues to be the predominant discipline method in American schools despite the research showing there are no academic benefits to the practice. Additionally, it is strongly associated with low achievement, a heightened risk for dropping out, and a greater likelihood of juvenile justice involvement. According to the Consolidated Data Report for the school year 2016-17 for the North Carolina General Assembly, The NC Department of Public Instruction revealed there were 209,234 suspensions for students in 2016-17. Of those students, Black students made up the majority of students suspended, despite being a small percentage of the student body overall. North Carolina had only 18 expulsions during the 2016-17 school year, however the racial disparities in discipline were obvious there. No white students were expelled, while 1 American Indian student, 3 Hispanic students, and 14 Black students were expelled. Research and educational equity advocates have recognized the clear link between exclusionary discipline and incarceration (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Mallett, 2015; White, 2018). This phenomenon is known as the school-to-prison pipeline, and has revealed how this push-out can lead to negative consequences, with a potential ending being incarceration. Researchers agree that in the United States we have a persistent challenge with the overrepresentation of young Black females in juvenile detention centers and prisons, particularly in comparison to the underrepresentation of high school and

graduation rates (Casserly et al., 2012; Fowler, 2011; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009).

Despite these punitive disciplinary practices negatively impacting Black girls, they are often left out of targeted interventions, supportive services, and research literature. Rather than addressing the trauma and barriers girls face in their lives, school systems often end up re-injuring or traumatizing these students. Most research on the school-to-prison pipeline focuses solely on Black boys and neglects the experiences of girls (Winn & Jackson, 2011). This can become a vicious cycle with the silencing of the female voice and experience, on both a systemic and institutional platform (Crenshaw, 2012). There is a plethora of research and interventions in place for Black men and boys, and thus an increased awareness of their experience and what types of support would be most useful. However, these frameworks often exclude women and girls. There is a lack of acknowledgement of the strengths of and barriers for Black female students, which ignores the "whole self" of these students. Morris (2016) believed this absence of research silenced a more detailed investigation about how racial identity, gender, class, sexual identity, ability and other identities interact.

It is inappropriate and shortsighted to address and focus on the punitive discipline alone. The institutionalized and structural trauma marginalized youth go through within our systems is often forgotten and under-researched. Black girls in the American education system face challenges, struggles, and barriers every day, not just in school but potentially in their communities and homes as well. By ignoring these traumas, there is a chance one will miss the ability to support these girls and diminish the barriers they face. It is similarly necessary to focus on the agency, hope, and strength of these girls. This study aims to highlight the ways Black girls

are already navigating the educational system and beyond, and educate educators and community members on how they can best support and assist these students.

Background of the Problem

The interactions between teachers and administration concerning Black and Brown children, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have shown to be problematic. The findings in the literature show that most disciplinary referrals originate in the classroom and the referrals are predominately for students of Color, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Martinez, McMahon, & Treger, 2016; Van Dyke, 2016; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). School administration, usually principals, have the ability and power to suspend or expel students based on (a) their interpretation of the behavior described by teachers in the classrooms and (b) their interpretation of rules and policy violation (Brinia, & Papantoniou, 2016; Dubin, 2006; Hartzell & National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1995). Academic performance suffers when students are not in the classroom (Gottfried, 2014: Fuhs, Nesbitt, & Jackson, 2018; Gregory, & Roberts, 2017). Many school districts have found that implementing restorative practice in their schools is a positive alternative to zero tolerance and other practices, and can be used as a preventative measure of discipline (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016; McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Riddell, & Weedon, 2008). This is crucial if we as educators are to reach girls of Color in the school system. The inequitable treatment of girls within school systems can often re-traumatize the girls rather than addressing their trauma, and potentially pushing them directly and indirectly into the prison industrial complex (Blake, Butler, Lewis, Darensbourg, 2011; Niemi, 2005). Educational research focusing on the school-to-prison pipeline often ignore the voices, experiences, and perceptions of girls (Winn & Jackson, 2011). Crenshaw (2015) reported, “many

educators, activists, and community members remain under-informed about the consequences of punitive school policies on girls as well as the distinctly gendered dynamics of zero-tolerance environments that limit their educational achievements (pg. 10-11).” This creates a vicious cycle of systemic and institutional silencing of the girls’ experiences. The lack of acknowledging Black girls silences an in-depth analysis of how racial identity, gender, class, sexual identity, ability, and other identities interact (Morris, 2016).

To meet the needs of a diverse population of students in the United States education system, scholars, mental health professionals, teachers, and administrators would benefit from interrogating the disciplinary policies that disproportionally marginalize, stigmatize, and impact the academic and behavioral outcomes of students. Additionally, understanding the lived experiences of Black girls, reviewing practices not just as they are perceived by educators, and examining the mechanisms that propagate or repel the system of racial and social inequality in schools will be how the education system will be able to reach and support these students.

Statement of the Problem

A relationship between punitive or exclusionary disciplinary practices and the criminal justice system has been shown in research and statistical data (Crenshaw, 2012). Punitive school policies have an adversarial consequence for minority students. The outcomes of the exclusionary discipline are low student achievement, school push out, school dropout, and association with the criminal justice system (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Koch, 2000). Organizations and professionals have designed interventions, which address the school-to-prison pipeline in terms of Black males, while overlooking the needs of Black girls. Many educators and programs have seemingly assumed that Black girls are not an at-risk group, despite school discipline

statistics supporting the need for additional analysis. The school-to-prison pipeline exposes Black girls to violence, arrest and suspension (Morris, 2013).

While there is some research and interventions in regards to the concerns related to Black girls in the education system, it is limited compared to research and interventions for other genders and racial identities (Wun, 2016; Jones, 2006; Ricks, 2014). Black girls are generally disregarded in educational research about trauma and disciplinary action, and when they are included it tends to be through a deficit lens, thus reinforcing the trauma and struggle (Morris, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017; Aston et al., 2018).

The harm of the injustice suffered by these young women impacts not only themselves but also society as a whole. Educators have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure all children are receiving high levels of instruction. Our education system should be affording all students successful outcomes and increased level of educational attainment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to engage the voices of Black girls in the North Carolina school system, by encouraging them in a process of inquiry that allows them to share their experiences and perceptions of the education system; describe how they counter deficit-based narratives of racialized trauma; and to share the culturally-relevant practices, tools, and knowledge they have created to inform educational decision-makers that inform disciplinary practice. This is done through the lens of exploratory qualitative research: by observing the lived experiences of Black girls in North Carolina, and reflecting on the essence and agency the girls exhibit (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding within the field of education about the complexities of Black female adolescence and growth within the school system by: (a) interviewing and observing Black girls in scientific inquiry that

explores their lived experiences, (b) utilizing Black girls' voices and experiences to tell their stories thus providing a narrative, (c) encouraging Black girls to participate in research, and (d) effecting change and making recommendations based on participants for how Black girls could, and should, be treated within educational spaces and the school systems (Creswell, 2002, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The present study is developed from current research demonstrating that a variety of school-based factors have led to a notable rise in the incidence of incarceration for Black girls of school age in recent years (Casella, 2008; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Noguera, 2003). Research has pointed to several factors that indicate the link between school and prison, notably how they relate to Black girls (Hirschfeld, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Previous research has labeled these factors as: stringent school disciplinary policies (i.e., zero tolerance policies) (Noguera, 2008; Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002); teacher bias (Wald & Losen, 2003; Fenning & Rose, 2007); and the dynamics of adult power and control in the classroom, which can affect the achievement and behavioral functioning of students (Noguera, 2008; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). The interplay of these factors speaks to an amalgamation of structural influences, and a cycle of administrative behaviors and reactions that work in very complex ways within schools. These factors have the ability to impact key life-stage outcomes for young Black girls, including continuing in their educational career or potentially entering the juvenile or criminal justice system (Gonzalez, 2011; Noguera, 2008).

Rooted within this present study are emerging questions about racial identity, class, educational practices and policies. Presenting these questions, and the experiences and perceptions of these girls for constructive national discourse is the overarching purpose of this research study. Further, it is the intent of any findings from this study to positively add to the

creation of effective school- and community-based interventions, as well as inform school reform efforts to decrease the number of Black females who disproportionately end up as a casualty of the school-to-prison pipeline.

This study aims to describe the lived experiences of these students that can yield findings supporting policy making, theory constructing, as well as the practice of those who work with adolescents, particularly in the educational system (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2002). To be effective, school psychologists structure their interventions to meet the needs of the student based on the student's perspective and subjective reality. These students create their own subjective reality through the meanings they construct about themselves, those around them, and the universe (Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Weisner, 1993). This study aims to highlight the subjective reality to meet the students where they are, and discover how best to support the students towards their perceptions of success. The outcomes of this study should assist policymakers and stakeholders to better understand and support Black girls who wish to improve their education and recognize their inherent strengths. This research seeks to add to the collection of studies using a Critical Race Feminist Theory methodology, as well as Critical Whiteness Studies methodology which supports a more strengths-based, narrative perspective of research. Listening to these women and seeking a deeper understanding of how racism has impacted their life trajectory will have the potential to present to other researchers, advocates, policymakers, and educators the first-hand reflections of what issues youth and young adult girls of Color face as they transition into adulthood, thus allowing for better support and design policies and programs that will diminish and potentially eradicate the barriers to education and lifelong success.

Research Questions

Given the background and concerns regarding the Black female experience, the current study will use a grounded theory qualitative research design drawing on Critical Race Feminist Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies. This study will draw on the perspectives of Black adolescent girls, and their experiences within the North Carolina school system. The research questions were developed to explore the experiences of Black girls within the North Carolina school system, as well as explore how school psychologists and educators can best support Black girls in the education system. This will be done with comprehensive individual interviews with each research participant.

Research Questions

1. How do Black girls in high school describe their experiences with racism in the education system?
2. Where do Black girls in high school see gaps within and barriers to services and support?
3. What spaces and structures in schools support Black girls' agency and aptitude?
4. What protective factors and strengths do they feel they possess?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this dissertation is to examine how racism and zero-tolerance policies in school settings have impacted female students of Color living in urban and rural environments in North Carolina. The participants in the study are considered active actors in a culture created beyond and within the walls of the school. Within the education setting, there are factors informing the choices Black girls are making within the environment: behavioral choices; power dynamics; states of emotional development; and systems, both social and organizational. Interviews and questionnaires are aligned to present research questions to better describe factors in the school context that lead to distress for and traumatization of Black female students, as well

as the possible future contact with the juvenile justice system and add some insight to the existing body of knowledge in this research area. By focusing on the protective factors and strengths of the girls, this study can contribute to the progress of services and programs in schools and communities to reach these students where they are and support their growth. Findings of the study could address the work of school psychologists and educators to provide fair and equitable learning environments while addressing school culture for adolescent Black girls. Further, findings of the study could also inform stakeholders and policymakers to reassess disciplinary practices in schools, and how such policies impact female students of Color.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

A major assumption of the current study is that participants will provide necessary and honest information during the interviews. A second assumption is that the principal investigator will establish rapport for participants to engage fully in sessions and respond to qualitative inquiry to their maximum potential. It is important for the researcher to address their own work and biases, and any factors relevant to the study. This study is also based on the assumption that all subjects will be willing participants, and that interviews will provide the necessary information to interpret the data through an exploratory approach. There are limitations to the current study. The researcher will be solely focusing on a small set of students for interviews due to time and location constraints. The researcher will also be observing and interviewing alone, as well as analyzing the data solo. While the researcher will be looking at their own biases and perceptions, not having multiple researchers could potentially be a limitation regarding having discussion and debate about analyses.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Malterud stated in 2001 that “a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484)”. It is important to impart my positionality at this point in the research. My adolescence was not a smooth road. I come from a world of privilege, in an upper-middle income white family. I grew up with memberships to beach clubs and yacht clubs, and received my first horse when I was 13. I was able to attend a private boarding high school and whichever college I could get into, without worrying about scholarships or financial aid, as my parents were willing and able to pay full tuition wherever I went. Despite this, I struggled immensely. I developed drug and alcohol addictions by the time I was fourteen years old, and engaged in self-injurious behaviors and suicide attempts throughout adolescence. I was suspended in ninth grade, and received detention more weekends than not between ninth and twelfth grade. At nineteen years old, after being expelled from college after one school year for drinking in the dorms and then attempting suicide, I elected to go through rehabilitation at a private-pay, inpatient program. This, also, was paid for by my parents. The reason I am here today, writing a dissertation for my Doctorate, is that I had support along every step of my journey; parents, educators, administration, faculty, and others who kept me from destroying my future. It was similar to bowling with the bumpers up: The bowling ball (me) could bump along the walls all I wanted but I was not going to end up in the gutter. For many families and young girls, this is not the case. Many adolescent girls do not have the financial and emotional safety net within their school or family systems. This is especially true for Black and marginalized families, where even if financially stable and “safe”, they may be impacted by institutional and

systemic racism. Adolescents make mistakes, and I believe that is what adolescence is for: to learn and to grow.

Reflexivity is the process of examining both oneself as researcher, and the research relationship. Self-searching involves examining one's "conceptual baggage," one's assumptions and preconceptions, and how these affect research decisions, particularly, the selection and wording of questions. Reflecting on the research relationship involves examining one's relationship to the respondent, and how the relationship dynamics affect responses to questions (Mao et al., 2016). As I mentioned previously, I am a white woman. I aim to not just be another white person studying Black people; that research is tried and tired. I aim to have my participants' voices be the star and context of this research, and will be examining my analysis throughout to ensure the messages and voices of this study stay true to the voices of the participants. I at no point assume I know the participants' experiences, nor do I assume to know what I will find in this study. I aim to learn from the participants, and inform my work as a school psychologist and within education systems to best support the students.

Summary and Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into six chapters and an appendix section. The first chapter will provide a brief introduction regarding racial and gendered discipline disparities and education equity, the rationale for the study, the rationale for using qualitative research methods, statement of the problem, and the research questions. Chapter two will present a comprehensive review of the literature. The third chapter will describe the framework and theories the research questions and methods are built upon, going into detail regarding the lenses through which the researcher will be analyzing the collected data. Chapter four will describe the research methods including how cases will be selected, the forms of data collection, how data will be analyzed, the

validation strategies used to increase the validity and reliability of the study, potential ethical issues, and the role and background of the researcher. Chapter five will present and highlight the results of the case-by-case analysis. In this chapter, each case will be described in great detail along with the themes that emerged from each of the cases. Themes will be presented accompanied with quotes. The last chapter will discuss the results of the study, the implications for theory development, practice, public policy, future research, the strengths and limitations of the study, a conclusion, a section on lessons learned, as well as the references used in all the chapters of this dissertation. There will also be an appendix section that include copies of the internal review board approval from UNC, the informed consent forms, and interview protocols.

Definitions

African American/Black – racially identifies as African American, Black, of African descent. Within this study, African American (ethnic identity) and Black (racial identity) are used interchangeably (Hays & Erford, 2014).

Critical Whiteness Studies — Applebaum (2016) defines Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) "…as a growing field of scholarship whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege" (para. 2).

Critical Race Theory — A philosophy for white people to begin to understand themselves as racialized and contributing to the systems of white supremacy (Matias, at el., 2014).

Discourse Theory — Haviland (2008) defines educational discourse theory as the "…collection of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking…" (p. 41).

Female – The current study focuses on cisgender females. A cisgender person is someone who identifies as the gender/sex they were assigned at birth (Smith, Shin, & Officer, 2012). The terms female, girls, woman/en are used interchangeably for the purposes of the study.

Intersectionality – a term coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) which studies overlapping social identities (gender and racial identity) and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination of women of color in American society

Predominately White Institutions (PWI) – A term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Caucasians account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment.

Race — a socially constructed ideology based on melanin in the skin, privileging whites over people of color.

White Privilege — Peggy McIntosh (1989) describes white privilege as "… an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 10).

White Supremacy — the systemic and individual mechanisms in society which create and maintain power differentials with power and privilege for whites at the expense of people of color.

Whiteness — for the purpose of this study, whiteness is not one's racial identity but is instead defined by Picower (2009) as "the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain White supremacy" (p. 198).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Literature Review Collection and Research

This chapter reviews the literature as it relates to the experiences of Black girls in the American education system. To explore this topic and to frame the need for such a study, I sought research that addressed Black girls in the education system, trauma, racism, white supremacy, and the history of the American education system. I conducted a review of literature by first searching for peer reviewed studies and literature reviews that addressed black students' experiences in education with respect to class, racial identity, ethnicity, and gender. In my review of the literature, there are a plethora of articles in regards to the Black male experience. However, I recognized the gap in scholarship as there is not a comprehensive body of research that addresses these combined factors for Black girls. There is a need to research the ways in which these issues of racial identity, socioeconomic status, gender, and educational success intersect to impact a Black female student's experiences in the American education system where Black students can easily become invisible, or placed. Follow up searches included terms from theories important to this study. Search terms included: institutional racism, anti-racism, student, transition, adjustment, experience, higher education, postsecondary institution, low socioeconomic status, class, low-income, first in family, gender, women, female, Black, African American, white, racial identity, ethnicity, diverse, diversity, underrepresented, intersectional,

anti-deficit, culture, climate. I used electronic academic search engines such as ERIC EBSCO, Project Muse, Google Scholar, UNC Articles +, and JSTOR to conduct this search. I reviewed relevant studies from reference lists. Additionally, in a millennial twist, I connected with current researchers and scholars discussing studies, references, and literature on Instagram. There, I was linked with educators and activists with a seemingly never-ending list of resources.

Introduction

It is well reported and repeated that education is the surest way to move forward in society, achieve social equity, and ultimately acquire a career and increase one's net worth. While this may be true for some children in the United States, research and history have shown that for other students, school settings have been their introduction to the justice system and racial disparities in discipline. For many Black students in particular, education has led to underachievement in the form of test result comparisons and discipline rates. Additionally, school settings can be traumatizing for Black students due to microaggressions, macroaggressions, and institutional and systemic racism.

Desegregation and Racial Inequity in United States Schools

Examples of inequality and racial disparity are common in United States history. The United States was founded as a formal state of white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Feagin, 2010). In order to have access to the rights and privileges of American citizenship, one had to be racially classified as white. One of the first laws passed by the United States Congress, the Naturalization Act of 1790, stated American Citizenship was specifically limited to "free white persons" of "good character" (Zinn, 2010). Long after the Civil War and the provision of some unalienable rights to Black citizens, in 1896 the United States Supreme Court sanctioned legislation that legitimized Jim Crow laws for the entire nation, continuing the oft overused

"separate but equal" (Ford, 2003). These laws helped to normalize the practice of racial separation within government institutions, including schools (Orfield & Thronson, 1993). In the 1960s, when Civil Rights leaders forced the overturning of the segregation in public schools, many white families fled to private schools and public schools located in suburban areas, while many Black students were contained in under-resourced public schools (Ford, 2003). In the 1971 Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that the federal courts had the discretion to include busing as a desegregation tool to achieve racial balance. (Patterson, 2001). Several cities attempted to bus students to different schools in order to desegregate the schools, though those were often met with violence and riots, such as the "Restore Our Alienated Rights" movement in Boston, Massachusetts. One of the consequences of desegregation was the sharp decline of Black teachers in the United States. Between 1954 and 1965, after Brown vs. Board of Education, more than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). The Superintendent of Schools in Topeka, Kansas, sent out a letter terminating the Black teachers' contracts because they assumed that "the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for White children" (Moore & Taylor, 2003, p. 323). The Moberly, Missouri school district fired all of its certified Black teachers (one who held a doctorate degree), whereas all of the 125 white teachers were retained, including those who had only provisional certificates (Foster, 1997). From 1975 to 1985, the number of Black students who chose teacher education as a major declined by 66 percent. When new teacher certification requirements were released and teacher education program admission requirements changed, 21,515 Black teachers were displaced. As of 2001, Black teachers represented 6% of the public school teaching force (Tillman, 2004). National data from 2011-2012 found that in 24 states, more than 90 percent of

teachers were white, and in 17 of those states more than 95 percent were white (Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters 2015). In 2016, teachers who were white made up 80 percent of the teacher population. Teachers who were Black declined in population from 8 to 7 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

While considerable progress has been made since the Jim Crow era, there are those that have found the Jim Crow laws to have simply been reconfigured, finding loopholes to maintain social inequity. In Michelle Alexander's 2012 book "The New Jim Crow", she theorizes that mass incarceration, justified and organized around the war on drugs, has become the new face of racial discrimination in the United States. Since 1970, the number of people behind bars in this country has increased 600 percent (Beckett, 2018; Beckett & Herbert, 2009; Brunson & Miller, 2006). In addition to that increase, The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its Black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid (Schoenfeld, 2018). For Black Americans, the incarceration rate in 2010 was 2,207 per 100,000 Americans. For Black men, the rate is 4,347 per 100,000 Americans, and for Black American women is 260 per 100,000 Americans. With these rates, the odds that Black children have a parent, loved one, or relative who has either spent time behind bars or who has acquired a criminal record and thus is part of the "under-caste", or the group of people who can be legally discriminated against for the rest of their lives, is significantly increased (Alexander, 2012; Pettit, 2012; Forman, 2017). If the child's parent or parents are incarcerated, they are more likely to be raised in severe poverty; their parents are unlikely to be able to find work or housing and are often ineligible even for food stamps. They are more likely to be raised in severe poverty; their parents are unlikely to be able to find work or housing and are often ineligible even for food stamps. Children who have incarcerated parents are far more likely themselves to be incarcerated (Cyphert, 2018; Kessler &

Arroyo, 2017; Shlafer, Reedy, & Davis, 2017; Davis & Shlafer, 2016). Inequalities exist currently within schools as evidenced by documented disproportion in the representation of Black students in remedial and special education classes. In addition to this, they are also underrepresented in advanced-placement, Honors, and International Baccalaureate courses (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Davis, Davis, & Mobley, 2013, Ford & Whiting, 2011; Irving & Hudley, 2005).

School-To-Prison Pipeline

In the United States, the practices and discourses of the juvenile justice system have made their way into many schools, leading to the criminalization of behaviors such as increased suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests (Kupchik, 2010; Nolan, 2011), giving rise to the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

The school-to-prison pipeline has been defined as a "confluence of exclusionary educational policies in under-resourced public schools and a punitive juvenile justice system that fails to provide education and mental health services for most at-risk students and drastically increases the likelihood that these children will end up with a criminal record rather than a high school diploma" (Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010, p. 4). As schools have begun using zero tolerance policies and employing police officers and School Resource Officers, the increasing role of law enforcement in schools has had the effect of pushing marginalized students out of school and into the criminal justice system (Fancher, 2011). While the increase of law enforcement became more prevalent and pronounced in the 1980's, during the "get tough on drugs and crime" policies implemented by the Reagan Administration (Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015), this push-out has been happening for decades. H.R. Haldeman was the chief of staff for President Richard Nixon until the Watergate scandal broke and he was dismissed. Audio recordings and Haldeman's daily

dairy entries were compiled and released by G.P. Putnam's Sons, and revealed Nixon had said the following:

> (Nixon) emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the Blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to. Pointed out there has never in history been an adequate Black nation, and they are the only race of which this is true. Says Africa is hopeless. (Forman, 2012, p. 10)

With each following president, this "tough on crime" attitude resulted in increasing numbers of arrests and punitive disciplinary actions. In addition to the "three-strikes" laws in which an individual is incarcerated at their third offense, regardless of the situations or severity of the offense, there is also a misguided following of the "broken windows theory", or the idea that if you aggressively punish a minor offense that customarily would have been ignored, that future crimes will be prevented (Welsh, Braga, & Bruinsma, 2015). By punishing these students harshly for minor, and often subjective, offenses, educators may be putting these students on a path towards drop-out and incarceration. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance project sent out a survey to K-12 educators across the country after the 2016 Presidential election results and survey data indicated the results of the election were having an overwhelmingly negative impact on schools and students. Ninety percent of educators reported that the school climate had been negatively affected, and eighty percent described "heightened anxiety and concern on the part of the students". Educators provided additional commentary to the survey, revealing "an increase in the bullying, harassment and intimidation of students whose races, religions or nationalities have been the verbal targets of candidates" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016).

Exclusionary Discipline

Current research has shown that Black students are disproportionately represented in suspension statistics (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), as are those who receive free or reduced lunches, which is suggestive of low socio-economic status (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Minority students are at a particular disadvantage in regards to disproportion in school discipline practices, particularly urban, low-income, Black students (Noguera, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Black and Latinx students are suspended 2.3 times more often than white students, and tend to receive harsher sanctions such as suspensions, expulsions, and arrests for the same conduct as their white peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Further, youth from concentrated areas of poverty are generally overrepresented in suspension rates. As a result, zero-tolerance policies have become the most direct method of the school-to-prison pipeline for poor, Black and Latino students. Research to date has not supported the efficacy of suspension as a behaviour management procedure (Mowen & Brent, 2016; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). The purpose of suspension is to provide a sanction for major disciplinary problems, such as the use of weapons, drug abuse, and gang fighting (Sughrue, 2003). Research has revealed, however, that suspension is being applied most often for lesser infractions, such as lack of punctuality, non-compliance, and disrespect (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Indeed, suspension has become the most commonly used sanction for inappropriate behaviour (Skiba & Knesting, 2001) since the inception of zero tolerance policies (Donohue, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999).

Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance is impacting a greater diversity of communities than ever before, however due to continuing biases, disparate treatment, and systemic inequities, students of Color are

particularly harmed by these policies and practices (Sellers & Arrigo, 2018; Skiba, 2014; Casella, 2003). As a result, national and local policymakers have called on schools to reduce the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices—those that remove students from the classroom (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). In 1994, The Gun-Free Schools Act mandated a yearlong out-of-school suspension for any student caught bringing a weapon to school (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). As states began adopting these zero-tolerance policies, the number of suspensions and expulsions increased. The suspension rate for all students has nearly doubled since the 1970s, and has increased even more for Black and Hispanic students. During the Obama administration, investigations were opened into the civil rights implications of schools' discipline policies. The administration also encouraged schools to restructure how they discipline, making expulsion and suspension a last resort (White House Report Archives, 2016). Through a joint Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services Policy Statement, the administration reported that suspension and expulsion can contribute to a number of adverse outcomes for childhood development in areas such as personal health, interactions with the criminal justice system, and education. Obama's *Rethink School Discipline* policies speak to the concept of contrasting impact, the disproportionately higher rates of discipline for students in particular racial groups. However, since appointing Betsy DeVos to Secretary of Education, the Trump Administration has discussed repealing these policies. While they haven't put pen to paper to repeal yet, the reports from the current administration have leaned heavily towards repealing the school discipline policy, as well as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, the Affordable Care Act, and the Gun-Free School Zones Act (Barondes, 2017). There are progressive and liberal organizations working to keep the policies intact and, in case they are repealed, working to support the students through their educational careers.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Students who have been expelled or suspended are not only missing educational instruction, they are also often lacking in supervision during that time they are away from school. The students may end up with more time to get into trouble, and those students are more likely to be suspended again. When a student is suspended or expelled, they may receive their schoolwork to keep the student from falling behind in their studies, however over half the states do not require the schools to provide schoolwork to absent students, regardless of illness, suspension, or expulsion. Repeat offending for school suspension is relatively high, ranging from 35-45 percent (Skiba, 2014; Matjasko, 2011; Farrall, Godfrey, & Cox, 2012). Additionally, when a student's education is interrupted as a result of numerous suspensions or expulsions, they are significantly more likely to drop out and be arrested. Those interruptions in school can be pervasive for students who are attempting to transition between education within the juvenile justice system and back to traditional public schools. Past research also shows a higher likelihood of a failure to graduate on time and even dropping out of school (Burrus, et al, 2013; Lau, 2004). Beyond the impact on the student, there is also data indicating there is an economic impact of punitive and exclusionary justice. Locking up a juvenile can cost a state an average of $407.58 per person per day, and $148,767 per person per year. (Justice Policy Institute, 2014). As contrast, it costs on average $10,615 to send a kid to public school for a year. There is variation per state; Utah spends just over $6,000 per student, while New York and the District of Columbia are over $18,000, however that is a far cry from the cost of incarceration. One study found that juvenile incarceration increases a person's chances of going to jail again by 22 to 26 percent (Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Casserly, et al., 2012). Policy statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, and American Bar Association have come out

strongly against the over-use of suspensions, noting negative educational, social, and health consequences that are perceived to result from the punishments themselves (Das, 2017; Zulu, 2014; Sibblis, 2014).

Punitive Discipline

There is great promise in the restorative approach to student discipline, however the likelihood that the methods are implemented with fidelity may be hampered by the current punitive trend in school discipline. Recently, school districts and some politicians have been more supportive of harsh approaches to preventing and identifying student misbehavior. Many schools have implemented increased surveillance cameras, metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, security-oriented School Resource Officers, and armed police (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Lynch, Gainey, & Chappell, 2016). For rule-breakers, some schools have enthusiastically endorsed severe punishments that would include revoking privileges and sanctioning detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Payne & Welch, 2015; Gottfredson et al, 2005; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). In worst case situations, schools are involving the juvenile and criminal practice systems in addressing serious violations, a harsh practice that can lead to terrible consequences for the offending students who are found responsible or guilty (May, Barranco, Stokes, Robertson, & Haynes, 2018; Lane, 2018). School-based zero tolerance policies have increased to include mandatory punishments for possession of "contraband" items, such as knives, drugs, and over-the-counter medication on some school grounds. With the Gun-Free Schools Act, some students were being punished for pretending their fingers were guns or in one instance, biting a Pop-Tart into the shape of a gun (Brand, 2015). In Edgewood, OH, a middle-school student was handed a 10-day suspension for "liking a picture of a gun on Instagram" (Brown, K., 2017). These fear-based trends result has been an increase in the number of students

receiving exclusionary discipline (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011).

Black Girls and Disciplinary Action

Exclusionary Discipline and Racial Disparity

Due to the statistical evidence, there has been an increase of research on Black men and the school-to-prison pipeline, which has stimulated the formation of programs to support and provide services to Black male students across educational levels. They include initiative programs, mentoring programs, after school programming. In North Carolina, Black males are suspended and expelled more frequently than any other demographic (McCarter & Barnett, 2017; Langberg & Brege, 2009; Story, 2014). Black boys are at the greatest risk for being disproportionality affected by the harsh discipline policies and disparities. However, Black girls are experiencing incredible inequitable discipline, and research has indicated that Black girls are being suspended at a higher rate than Black boys. In 2016, the Committee of Education & the Workforce Democrats compiled a fact sheet of Department of Education statistics. They found that Black girls are 16 percent of the girls in school, but 42 percent of girls receiving corporal punishment, 42 percent of girls expelled with or without education services, and 34 percent of girls arrested on campus. Black girls in public elementary and secondary schools nationwide were suspended at a rate of 12 percent, compared with a rate of just 2 percent for white girls. Black girls represented 50.7 percent of the girls with multiple out-of-school suspensions in 2013, while Black boys were 39.9 percent of boys with multiple out-of-school suspensions. The per-district suspension rates of Black girls increased by 5.3 percent from 2002 to 2006, compared to a 1.7 percent increase for Black boys. Black girls were suspended 5-12 times at the rate of white girls. Black boys are suspended three times as often as white boys, however Black girls are

suspended six times as often as white girls (Smith-Evans & George, 2014; Morris, 2013; Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). In addition to the racial bias, Black girls also face colorism: darker skin tone significantly raised Black girls' odds of being suspended (Crenshaw, 2015; Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013; Morris, 2013). Suspensions and expulsions of Black girls can be the cause of teacher bias and insufficient mental health resources; it can also occur when students break school rules that are fundamentally racially biased (Davis, Davis, & Mobley, 2013).

Davis and Jordan (1994) analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The researchers used a two-stage, stratified, random sample of 25,000 eighth graders in 1,000 schools across the country. Davis and Jordan described an association between disciplinary practices and Black achievement in middle schools. Skiba et al. (2002) analyzed disciplinary records of 11,001 students in 19 middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district. They reported a "differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein Black students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation" (p. 317) whereas white students are referred to the office for more objective infractions. One study found that "inappropriate dress" was the second most cited reason for a behavioral infraction for Black girls (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). It is a serious concern that "appropriate" behavior is socially constructed and not universally accepted, nor does it take into consideration cultural norms. The subjective nature of teachers' practices with Black students in this sense centers issues of racial identity and racism. For example, if a Black student 'talks back' or 'mouths off' to a teacher, the teacher may interpret this behavior as completely disrespectful and intolerable. Policies such as zero tolerance are often, though perhaps unintentionally, full of racism, especially when they are constructed by and follow a white norm that excludes the behavioral

and interactional styles, cultures, and practices of "non-white" people (Berlowitz, Frye, & Jette, 2017; Losinki, Katsiyannis, Ryan, & Baughan, 2014). Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) investigated archival disciplinary referral data in order to define the reasons reported for referrals, the environments under which the decisions were made, the various disciplinary responses, and the rate of suspension, in addition to other issues surrounding the disciplinary incident. The results showed that office referrals were not a consequence of a threat of safety, but "those that indicate noncompliance [insubordination] or disrespect . . . about 40% of all students receive at least one office referral in the middle school during the school year" (p. 295). Additionally, the researchers found a pattern of disproportionality "in the administration of school discipline based on race, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and disability" (p. 295). Another national data set showed that in 2007, only 18 percent of white high school students had ever been suspended, but 49 percent of Black students had been suspended at least once (Aud, Kewal Ramani, & Frohlich, 2011). These suspensions and expulsions can lead to students feeling they don't belong or aren't welcome in school settings. In a national survey of students who dropped out of school, Black students were more likely than students of other racial backgrounds to cite having been expelled or suspended too often as a reason they dropped out (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996).

Disciplinary Consequences

Failure to complete secondary school—due to exclusionary discipline or otherwise— can have dismal consequences for a child's life outcomes, including poor future educational attainment (Gottfried, 2010), long-term unemployment (Couch & Fairlie, 2010; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009), low lifetime earnings (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, & O'Grady, 2014), and mental and physical illness (Boynton, O'Hara, Covault, Scott, & Tennen, 2014; Lambert et al., 2016).

There is also the connection between school discipline problems and dropout with juvenile detention (Hirschfield, 2008), adult incarceration (Turney, 2014), and recidivism (Jung, Spjeldnes, & Yamatani, 2010). One longitudinal study of 1,354 children found when a child was expelled or suspended, that child was more than two times more likely to be arrested within the same month compared with a child who had not been expelled or suspended (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014).

Federal and State Acts and Programs

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974 is a federal law that provides funds to states that follow a series of federal protections on the care and treatment of youth in the justice system. In the state of North Carolina, since 2002 when the JJDPA was last reauthorized, the federal juvenile justice funding has decreased by 58 percent (The Coalition for Juvenile Justice, n.d.). The JJDPA has been due for reauthorization since 2007, and while other bills have come up which would reauthorize JJDPA or find federal funding for states to provide four substantive safeguards for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, the bills have not been approved as of yet. North Carolina agencies have attempted to step up to the needs of marginalized youth in the school system, but many of the programs focus on the needs of boys and do not recognize the extra struggles of girls. Research by WEBelieve, an organization which stands for Women Everywhere Believe, found that over the last decade over 100 million dollars had been invested in achievement, dropout prevention, and mentoring initiatives exclusively targeting Black and Brown boys. In that same time, less than 1 million dollars in funding was targeted towards Black and Brown girls (Booker, 2016; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2003).

Risk Factors

Youth and adolescents labelled as delinquent often have critical family, social, and psychological problems; however, among girls, there are four factors that appear to be particularly significant: mental health, wealth and income disparities, physical health, and violence and abuse (Lederman, Dakof, Larrea, & Li 2004). There have been limited studies presenting comprehensive needs assessments on a diverse sample of detained girls to inform programming and their needs (Lederman et al., 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2001). Research has shown that, consistent with prior findings, girls frequently evidenced high rates of difficulty in the six areas, with more dysfunction linked with deeper justice system involvement (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Morris, 2007; Tatum, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). When students are struggling with these areas, it can be difficult to focus on schoolwork and one's academic career. The racial disparity in school discipline and support does not help with these potential areas of difficulty.

Mental Health

Black girls in the United States are not only facing these disparities in the education system, but they are also facing struggle outside of school that could be negatively impacting their ability to function in school settings. Black girls have a higher incidence of emotional and mental health concerns. Black girls have higher incidence of emotional difficulties than other girls, including signs of depression. In 2009, a national survey found that, compared to 31% of white girls and 40% of Latina girls, 67% of Black girls indicated that they felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks straight (Flores, 2016; Black Policy Forum, 2014).

Wealth and Income Disparity

Numerous studies have found that dropping out of high school is linked to serious long-term consequences, many of which are greater for Black women than Black men. For example, a

Black woman who has dropped out will make about $7,000 less a year than a high school graduate (Stewart, Winter, Henderson-King, & Henderson-King, 2015), will be more likely to need welfare support than both female and male peers, and children of women who drop out are more likely to drop out than children of male dropouts (Hendrick, Cance, & Maslowsky, 2016; Ryan, Perron, & Huang, 2016). Even when a Black woman does graduate, they will statistically earn less than their peers. Statistics from the Insight Center for Economic and Community Investment illustrate that, as of 2007, Black women earned only 64 cents per dollar earned by a white man, compared to 78 cents on the dollar earned by white women. Single Black women have the lowest net worth among all racial and gender groups, only $100 compared to $7,900 for single Black men, $41,500 for single white women, and $43,800 for single white men. This means that Black men have approximately 79 times the wealth of Black women; white women have approximately 415 times the wealth of Black women; and white men have approximately 438 times the wealth of Black women. A Black woman whom has graduated from high school fails to earn as much as a white male who has dropped out of school with a 9th grade education or less. Black women with Bachelor's degrees earn on average approximately $10,000 less than a white man with an Associate's degree. Among High School drop-outs, Black men earn nearly twice as much as Black women. (Campbell & DeWeever, 2014) Black women ages 18-24 have the highest unemployment rate amongst women nationwide and, during the Great Recession, lost more jobs than their male counterparts (Women's Bureau, 2016).

Physical Health

In terms of health and safety, Black women are more likely to be underinsured, not insured, injured, or killed than any other group of females. While health concerns can impact many students, Black girls are at a higher risk of certain illnesses. Black women are at a higher

risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Many of these diseases are exacerbated by obesity, of which the Black community is currently facing a crisis. Hilmers, Hilmers, and Dave (2012) reported that there has been limited access to quality food in many poor, predominately Black neighborhoods. Due to a lack of insurance and medical care, many are going without doctor appointments and preventative care to combat these illnesses.

According to a study done by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2015, Black women outpace other genders and racial identities when it comes to new diagnoses of sexually transmitted diseases and illnesses (Lima et al., 2018). One study based off the data found that it was not that Black women were having more sex than anyone else, but the lack of access to good preventative care is the crux of the issue: if women could see health care providers on a regular basis and be educated, they could potentially prevent new diagnoses. Another element is economic insecurity, as many sexual protection options cost money, as well as a stigma around talking about sexual activity, let alone safe sex. Despite this, the teen pregnancy rate has been steadily decreasing over the past two decades. Since 1991, teen birth rates among Black girls has declined by 67 percent (Berg & Nelson, 2016; Yu, et al, 2008). There have been several factors contributing to this decline. There has been an increase in education regarding adolescent pregnancy in part due to the Obama administration's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. One study reported specific media images impacted adolescent attitudes and outcomes around sexual activity and pregnancy, including *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* (Kearney & Levine, 2015). While the rates have declined, girls of Color are still more likely to become pregnant in adolescence. Teenage pregnancy disproportionately burdens young Black women. Despite a national decline in teenage pregnancy rates, the pregnancy rate among Black teens is still twice that of white teens (Shaw, et al., 2016; Rosenbaum, Zenilman, Rose,

Wingood, & DiClemente, 2016; Hall, Kusunoki, Gatny, & Barber, 2014). Poverty and geography play large roles in high teen birth rates. Poor teens of Color are less likely to have access to quality health care and contraceptive services (Hamilton, et al., 2018).

Violence and Abuse

According to the study, "Black Women in the United States, 2014", released by the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation Black Women's Roundtable, "Black women are especially likely to be a victim of violence in America. In fact, no woman is more likely to be murdered in America today than a Black woman. No woman is more likely to be raped than a Black woman. And no woman is more likely to be beaten, either by a stranger or by someone she loves and trusts than a Black woman." (Campbell & DeWeever, 2014). In 2010, the homicide rate among Black girls and women ages 10-24 was higher than for any other group of females, and higher than white and Asian men as well. The rate of firearm deaths for Black girls and women ages 10-24 from 2008 to 2010 was more than 6.5 times higher than white women and girls, more than 3.5 times higher than Hispanic women and girls, and more than 9 times higher than Asian/Pacific Islander women and girls. In 2011, 94% of Black women who were murdered were killed by someone they knew.

Racial identity and ethnicity are an important factor in identified sexual abuse. Black children have almost twice the risk of sexual abuse than white children. Children in low socioeconomic status households are three times as likely to be identified as a victim of child abuse. Children who live in rural areas are almost two times more likely to be identified as victims of child sexual abuse (Loeb, et al., 2011; Sedlak, et al., 2010). According to preliminary findings by Black Women's Blueprint, "60% of Black girls experience sexual assault… by the time they reach 18" (Black Women's Blueprint, n.d.) and for every Black woman that reports her

sexual assault there are at least fifteen Black women who do not report their experiences of abuse (Vogel et al., 2016). When Black children have been victimized and they exhibit maladaptive symptoms of their abuse, they tend to be labeled and stigmatized for their actions. In one qualitative study of girls in the juvenile justice system, two of the girls had court histories reporting they had presented with "promiscuous" behavior. In the interviews, they indicated that behavior was because "they had stopped saying no to boys to avoid being raped" (Morris & Perry, 2017; Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011).

Adolescents that are exposed to violence are at an increased risk for reduced academic achievement, aggressive, delinquent, or high-risk sexual behaviors, and substance abuse and dependence. This is regardless of if the person is the direct victim of sexual or physical abuse. This is particularly significant in urban areas of poverty, where data has shown children are more likely to be victims of maltreatment and/or neglect (Hartman, Stotts, Ottley, & Miller, 2017; Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, & Frechette, 2015). The ability to focus in the classroom can be difficult as a direct result of maltreatment or neglect at home. During interviews conducted with incarcerated women, one woman reported that when she was in school, she would often get in trouble for sleeping in class. When she was at home, she was afraid to sleep as her mother's boyfriend would try to molest her, so she would sleep at school because she felt safer there. Without the appropriate mental health and social services to properly recognize her circumstances and give her the resources and support she needed, she ultimately turned to drugs to self-medicate. Self-medication is a common behavior demonstrated by girls who have been abused, to numb the emotional and physical pain of abuse (Loeb, Gaines, Wyatt, Zhang, & Liu, 2011).

The feelings of neglect and emotional pain may manifest through aggression and "acting out" in school when girls do not have access to counseling and mental health services to address their needs. Girls who have been abused may have tense or difficult relationships with their classmates and teachers as a result of unhealthy interpersonal relationships. These girls may also feel threatened by teachers who run an authoritarian classroom and attempt to control the girls with aggression or aggressive statements. In some school environments, the behavior of students of Color may induce fear in white teachers, and this can lead the girls to being more vulnerable to disproportionately harsh disciplinary consequences (Miranda, Soffer, Polanco-Roman, Wheeler, & Moore, 2015; Yu, Adams, Burns, Brindis, & Irwin, 2008).

Restorative Practices and Positive Programs

Restorative practice, also known as restorative measures or approaches, has been in developmental mode in schools since the mid-nineties (Lohmeyer, 2017; Armour, 2016). Restorative practice is a revolutionary program based on respect, responsibility, relationship-building and relationship-repairing. It focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment. It aims to keep kids in school and to create a safe environment where learning can flourish (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Hansberry, 2016). Research on restorative practice techniques has analyzed individual schools, the types of practices used, and the effect on discipline rates over time (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that restorative practice results in better outcomes for students. In Wake County, data show that students who attended a victim-offender face-to-face meeting were three times less likely to have future conflicts than students who did not have such meetings (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015).

Restorative practice is the practice of restorative justice, which is a philosophical approach to crime and wrongdoing. It seeks to put the harm done, accountability for that harm by the wrongdoer, and repair of that harm at the center of the problem-solving, while including all stakeholders in the matter. A restorative approach is relational. With this practice, there is an understanding that when a wrong is committed, we as a community need to work with those involved to help them (1) take responsibility for their behavior, (2) to learn from the incident, and (3) to take what action is necessary to repair the harm. In order to most effectively help, it is necessary to pay attention to the stories of those harmed and help the person responsible understand how their actions have affected (Hansberry, 2016; Hopkins, 2015).

Restorative practice approaches need to be implemented consistently with fidelity before they can be rigorously evaluated, necessitating effective teacher and staff professional development as a first next step in building an evidence base for restorative practice methods. Increasing implementation of restorative practice requires buy-in from the teachers and staff. Research investigating training across a variety of skills has shown that teachers benefit most from professional development with a few specific qualities. Desimone (2009) describes the characteristics of teacher training that research has found to be fundamental to improving their teaching as (a) a content focus that trains teachers how students learn specific content; (b) active learning that allows teachers to discuss or practice skills; (c) coherence that links training to teacher knowledge and beliefs; (d) duration of training of at least 20 hours spread over a semester, which promotes change in practice; and (e) collective participation that encourages teachers who work closely together to interact throughout training and implementation. For example, professional development that allows teachers to integrate what they learn into their daily routine as opposed to receiving “one shot” trainings have resulted in better outcomes

(Hunzicker, 2011). Mihalic, Irwin, Fagan, Ballard, and Elliott (2004) found that teachers they trained demonstrated greater preparedness, fidelity of implementation, and student outcomes than untrained teachers implementing a violence prevention program. However, teachers who did not receive follow-up support across time stopped fully implementing the program or discontinued the program altogether.

Restorative Practice programs like those in the Oakland Unified School District and Los Angeles Unified School District have proven to be effective in decreasing the overall incidence of "student misbehavior" as well as reducing racial gaps (Brown, 2017; Davis, 2014). Restorative Practice is not an alternative for disciplinary action but rather an intervention prior to escalation. It provides whoever committed the wrong the chance to be held accountable by the community of students affected, and it allows those individuals to determine what must be done to reconcile (Zehr, 2004). These programs are often utilized by well-meaning white educators and administrators, however can miss the experiences of the Black students by remaining centered around whiteness.

Whiteness

White Privilege

White privilege has been described by Peggy McIntosh (1990) as:

> … an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks (p. 10).

There are those who argue that if you work hard you deserve compensation, rewards and benefits afforded to you for that hard work, and that each person should pull themselves up by their

bootstraps. Even when seeking to understand white privilege, white privilege is difficult to describe and quantify. Many in the United States, including in the field of education, are not seeking to understand white privilege at all. McIntosh (1990) wrote that most of the educational field is void of "…training in seeing [ourselves as white people] as oppressors, as unfairly advantaged people, or as participant[s] in a damaged culture" (p. 10). White people are not taught to see this as racism. McIntosh (1990) writes "… whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'" (p. 10). Learning about the manipulation and perversion of power and privilege throughout history can lead to feelings of shame and guilt. White anti-racist researcher, Gary Howard (2016) states, that at this point in his journey toward cultural competence, "…he had learned what it meant to be white in America, and didn't want to have anything to do with it. [He] had broken the seal on [his] own cultural encapsulation, blown away many of the old images, and didn't want to be identified with white folks anymore" (p.17). Many researchers, including Frankenberg (1993) and Howard (2016) discuss their struggle with shame and "fault" in the continuation of racism. Learning about and understanding unearned privilege can be an eye-opening journey in shame, hopelessness, and despair. And, if white people are to face their privilege and work to fix the system, they have to get past the shame and guilt (Wise, 2008). Leonardo (2004) has argued that white people need to move beyond white privilege as something which happens "passively to white people". White people must come to confront their involvement in the historical and current reality of oppression of Black people for personal gain. Leonardo goes on to write, "[Whites] set up a system that benefits the group, mystifies the system, removes the agents of action from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifles the discussion with inane comments about the "reality" of the

charges being made" (p. 148). Whiteness requires embodying and accepting contradictions and hypocrisies (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Leonardo (2004) argues "…a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issues of unearned advantages, or the state of being dominant, and more around the direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it" (p. 75). Leonardo (2004) argues, "... the cost of downplaying the active roles of whites who take resources from people of color all over the world, appropriate their labor and construct policies that deny minorities full participation in society" (p. 76). Additionally, it has been discussed that white privilege can only be understood by understanding white supremacy, and its historical and present role throughout American society (Frankenberg, 1993; Lensmire, 2010; Chubbuck, 2004).

White Supremacy

Robert Jensen (2005) has stated "The United States of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century—a century and a half after the end of slavery, four decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act—is a white-supremacist society" (p. 157). Jensen (2005) continues by detailing the unearned privileges whites possess, including higher quality schools, higher graduation rates, and higher rates of college completion (p. 158). Systems of white privilege, supremacy, and domination are taught to our students in our schools. Leonardo (2007) states "The hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates everyday school life…" (p. 83). Leonardo (2007) continues "…white supremacy is legislated by rules and laws dictating where people can and cannot live, who is deemed white, who can attend which schools, who can be a citizen, who is granted a living wage for a day of work and others" (p. 86-87).

Racism is not just the ku klux klan or extremist white supremacists. Instead, it is perpetuated by everyday white people who are complicit in the white supremacist laws and

norms which oppress people of Color while advancing white people. Leonardo (2009) writes, "…whites enjoy privileges largely because they have created a system of domination under which they can thrive as a group" (p. 88). While the people chanting "Jews will not replace us" in Charlottesville and the groups in Chapel Hill who fought to keep Silent Sam standing are dangerous and hateful, it is also all white people, engaged in racist systems who contribute to the oppression of people of color. While this study questions and exposes whiteness in American schools, it is important to know white supremacy is a global standard and injustice. World-wide, citizens of our planet, have used white supremacy to enslave, colonize, and "reeducate" people of Color into places of subordination.

Deficit Thinking

Every educator has implicit biases and assumed stereotypes socialized within themselves informing the ways they talk to and about students. Often, these biases and stereotypes consist of low expectations, and deficit understandings of students' abilities and culture (Ferguson, 2007; Delpit, 1988). Harper (2012) created an Anti-Deficit Framework, to invert commonly pursued research questions about Black male students' experiences through their academic careers. This framework was guided by the idea that there are many Black male students who enter postsecondary institutions with high levels of academic preparation, support, and motivation, allowing for them to succeed academically and in their careers, despite what is consistently reported in the media, journals, and research reports. (Harper, 2012; Harper, 2006) There is relatively little scholarship that exists considering the ways in which norms and stereotypes centered on the intersectionality of racial identity and gender influences how school settings respond to Black female students, and how these students react and adapt to the treatment they receive at school (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). The research that

does exist tends to split the identities of these women, by either researching the ways gender influences school for girls and women, which tends to investigate white, middle-class student populations, or by researching the way racial identity influences school for Black students, which tends to investigate the Black male experience (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Morris, 2017). Literature has predominately focused on Black students who are not performing well academically, and have not looked into students who perform well despite various barriers the students face (Cook, 2000; Ford, 2010; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Greenberger, Ifill, & Swarns, 2014; Williams, 2011). Additionally, fewer research studies have looked at the academic challenges that specifically impact Black females (Greenberger et al., 2014). United States schools have long been depicted as patriarchal settings (Weiler, 2000; Weis & Fine; 1993). Students identifying as female typically perform better in schools than their male identifying peers, however they are often depicted and seen less positively than their male identifying peers and are often given less social power in the classroom (Belenky et al., 1986; Morris, 2017). Academic stereotypes around gender can influence educators' views of boys as more inherently able and intellectually superior compared to females (Gray & Leith, 2004; Ellemers, 2018; Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018). Black females in US schools are also coming up against racial stereotypes about Black people that may also be gendered in the classroom (Chavous et al, 2007). Often, Black male students are thought to be less intellectually capable than their Black female peers (Noguera, 2003), while also receiving more frequent and harsher disciplinary treatment from their teachers and school administration, in relation to their white male and female peers (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Noguera, 2003). However, Black female students are often more likely to experience negative treatment based on both gender and racial group (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Irvine & Hudley, 2005). Black girls are frequently discouraged

by teachers to take on academic or leadership roles in the classroom, and, instead, are tasked with taking on social caring roles that are more consistent with the matriarch stereotype of Black women (McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Crenshaw, 2003). These preconceived stereotypes are uniquely related to the intersectionality of Black girls' gender and racial identity, and can unintentionally decide how these students are seen and treated in the school context and how it impacts their learning and development (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). In schools where standards of femininity and behavior are based on white, middle-class women, Black girls may find themselves feeling stigmatized and devalued (Fordham, 1993; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Black female students are routinely placed at a lower social status within the school setting, despite many of these girls having successfully developed a positive sense of self-worth, namely in the context of sexism and racism (Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015; Hurd, Albright, Wittrup, & Billingsley, 2018).

An example of deficit thinking is with the "culture of poverty" (Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2011 Bomer, et al., 2008). Oscar Lewis coined the term culture of poverty, which he derived from ethnographic studies he held in small Mexican communities outside of Mexico City (Lewis, 1998; Bomer et al., 2008; Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2011). Payne (2005) reclaimed the term culture of poverty in her book and teacher professional development series. As Bomer et al. (2008) explain "Payne describes the poor as a homogenous group, with the same ways of using language, interacting with others, and employing strategies to survive in the culture of poverty" (p. 2504). According to Bomer et al., (2008), Payne (2005) details the culture of poverty as

> …in brief, that poor people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geographical location, all live within a definable culture. This culture includes a self-perpetuating dynamic in

> which a poor individual re-creates his/her social position as a member of a family so that subsequent generations remain in poverty. (p. 2504).

Lewis' (1961) and Payne's (2005) work has drawn much criticism (Bomer et al., 2008). Some of the criticisms include: the lack of recognition of the structural barriers which exist for some and not others; the negation of racial identity or ethnicity as a contributing factor; grouping people together as one like-minded entity based on their socio-economic status; and profiting on the creation of deficit ideology (Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008). Payne's book and professional development remain popular in the educational field, despite defining class concept of generational poverty is rooted in families, since generations are familial by definition (Payne, 1998/2005). She claims poverty is a kind of "cultural heritability", handed from parents to children that is the responsibility of the school to break. Repeatedly, she describes a family structure unique to poverty, wherein "the mother is always at the center, though she may have multiple sexual relationships" (Payne, 2005).

Black children are sent to school each day with parents trusting the school will care for, educate, and encourage their children. Instead, the students find themselves in isolating situations with teachers who do not look or act like them, and undervalue their worth or future contribution to the world. Deficit thinking remains a common theology for teachers of America's children (Delpit, 1988; Leonardo, 2007). These biases lead to a power dynamic where the white teachers dominate over students of Color (Delpit, 2006). Slavers used "science" to dehumanize Africans to justify enslaving them and using their bodies for their own purposes (Hairston, 2009; Nelson & Williams, 2019). Dehumanization continues to exist today. Though teachers lean heavily on research, research itself has been culturally racist, finding Black people "genetically inferior, culturally deprived, and verbally deficient" (Delpit, 2006). Within the classroom, this culture of

low expectation and deficit thinking drives instructions, academic goals and daily interactions (Delpit, 2006; Haviland, 2008). Teacher education programs often reinforce deficit thinking, correlating poverty with racial identity, single-family homes, and cultural differences (Delpit, 2006; Haviland, 2008). Rather than to getting to know the students, families, and cultures on an individual basis, teachers form stereotypes of groups, using these generalizations and stereotypes to inform their instruction (Pollock, 2017). These manuals and professional developments may be well meaning and educators could feel culturally competent, but it may be a false sense of understanding, and dangerous for their students.

When educators are talking with or about students, these areas of cultural racism or assumptions about intellect may come across (Pollock, 2017). Whiteness is disseminated to Black students by their white teachers each day despite attempts to create culturally relevant curriculum, or involving families in schooling decisions (Ladson-Billing, 2005).

Racism persists in school systems and communities without the presence of extreme racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2019), because white privilege is not continued through acts of extreme racists. Instead, it is perpetuated by white people who close their eyes to unearned privileges (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Well-meaning white people do not want to be seen as racist, however many fail to do the work to close the achievement gap, the housing gap, wage gap or health care gap. By declaring themselves not racist, they are let off the hook and can pat themselves on the back while doing the bare minimum (Ahmed, 2004). When racial identity is brought up, white people often respond defensively, stating they or their families didn't personally own slaves or they "have a Black friend", both statements intended to let them off the hook in the perpetuation of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2004). White people are then able to deny their participation in the persistence and maintenance of white privilege. Leonardo (2004) discusses the problematic

nature of racism preserved by nice whites; white people who have good intentions, who believe slavery is wrong, but contribute to the continuation of white supremacy on a daily basis. Leonardo (2007) goes on to say, "These are processes that students rarely appreciate because their textbooks reinforce the innocence of whiteness" (p. 76).

Invisibility and Neutrality of Whiteness

Toni Morrison said in an interview for the Guardian in 1992, "In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate." The normal and typical is white, while everyone else is other. Tim Wise (2008) has likened whiteness and white racial privilege to the water a fish swims in. The fish doesn't know anything different than the water. The fish was born in water, raised in water; it is something they cannot see and cannot describe. The fish being asked this has no idea how to describe water as "…it surrounds [the fish] every minutes of the day [so] explaining what it is becomes virtually impossible. It simply is. It's taken for granted" (p. 239). Because of this invisibility, this "given", Frankenberg (1993) postures whiteness is cultural and unnamed, thereby defining whiteness as the right way to do things. This invisibility of whiteness is a tool of whiteness to guarantee the preservation and position of power (Allen, 1994; Frankenberg, 1993; Lipsitz, 2006; McIntosh, 1990). The suggestion that racial categorization is flexible – that it is something that changes over time – is one that is inconceivable or contrary for many Americans to understand. In this sense, white people are white people, they have always been white people, and they will always be white people (Allen, 1994). This, despite academics from both the physical and social sciences challenging the idea of natural racial identities, and showing, empirically, how racial classification is the product of social, political, and economic forces corresponding to any given moment in any given time (Armelagos & Goodman, 2010; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2012; Mullings, 2005; AKom, 2008; Jones, 2006; Omi and Winant,

1994). Race is a social construction (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2012; Omi and Winant, 1994; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck, 2007). DiAngelo (2011) offers that white people don't see themselves as racial. Instead, white people see people of Color as racialized. The invisibility of whiteness allows white privilege to be overlooked when racial identity is studied or examined. As Sue (2016) argues, white privilege will persist "…as long as whiteness remains invisible and is equated with normality and superiority" (p. 26). Ahmed (2004) contends "...whiteness studies makes that which is invisible visible: though for non-whites the project has to be described differently: it would be about making what can already be seen, visible in a different way" (p. 2). White privilege is an absence, it is the absence of negative consequences of racism (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Leonardo (2009) dispels "the myth of white ignorance". He argues white people's ignorance can be "…taken too far, [and thus] has unintended, but problematic consequences, one of which is that it promotes the "innocence" of whites when it comes to the structures of race and racism" (p. 107). Leonardo (2009) insists the invisibility of whiteness must be confronted, and problematized, if we are to confront white privilege and white people's role in privilege. Sue (2016) argues "Racism hides in the background of whiteness and its protected through a conspiracy of silence that aids in making it invisible" (p. 19). Without understanding white people's role in white privilege and domination, they are reproducing it and its systems of inequality. Using their privilege white people silence conversations about power and domination as a tool to perpetuate it.

White privilege is evident in conversations about racial identity and equity. When attempting to study equity and race, white educators and scholars often focus their attention on others—Black and Brown people—instead of focusing any efforts or attention on whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Race knowledge often uncovers knowledge of other cultures and how white

people, in their whiteness, can reach those others. Author, bell hooks (2015) asserts, "in white supremacist society, white people can "safely" imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze" (p. 30). This confirms white people's belief that the problem of racism is the people of color--not the white people. White people want to help "others": to assist Black and Brown people to "better" integrate in the "correct" white society.

Racial Permanence

There are systems that have been created and put in place to maintain the power structure on the backs of Black and Brown bodies. For hundreds of years, while Black and Brown people in American have been enslaved and oppressed white people "worked hard", while accumulating wealth through access to employment, health care, housing, and quality education. White people operate in a position of domination and control with rare reflection of the disparity of resources over Black Americans (Hayes & Jurarez, 2009). White people often believe in American meritocracy: that those who work, succeed. They assess their own hard work, goal setting and achievements, and believe they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, and made it happen for themselves. In the American reality, the cards are so brutally stacked against people of Color, it would take hundreds of years to accumulate the wealth and status the average white person possesses today. This myth of meritocracy is a tool of whiteness reproduction which secures white people's position of power and control (Haviland, 2008). Whiteness is a point of structural advantage (Frankenberg. 1993).

In the school system, those structural advantages lead to reproduction of whiteness. Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, (2016) argue a driving factor in a white teaching force is that

educators seek and hire people who look and act like themselves and "…this lack of diversity and critical perspectives allow dominant ideologies, especially those of whiteness, to center itself as the core of the curriculum, pedagogy, ethics and teaching emotions—a process that renders this hegemonic operation seemingly invisible, yet in plain sight" (p. 2).

This literature review and the conceptual framework in the next chapter together guided my investigation to examine the institutional educational structure, through the perspective of students who experience racism and culturally exclusive environments throughout their education, to provide institutional administrators and educators with methods that are culturally inclusive, competent, responsive, and anti-racist to an increasingly diverse student body. By interviewing students from high schools across North Carolina, I practiced complex comparisons of the experiences of students who had multiple and intersecting identities. I attempted to challenge the institutional structure, specifically the culture and climate, to be more inclusive and supportive of all students' success. I aim to not only validate the students' experiences and perspectives, but to also offer educators, administrators, and policy-makers specific ways to support students' success through their assets, rather than focusing on students' deficits or assumed deficits. The following chapter will review the conceptual framework on which the qualitative research is based.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Theoretical, or conceptual, frameworks are described as "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and informs your research" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 39). For the purpose of this study, theory grounds how we in research identify, name, interpret and write about Black girls' experiences in the North Carolina school system. It is imperative to identify the theories that will reflect the historical and social position for Black girls in the education system, and of others with whom they interact in their world. This study's framework will be built upon the tenets and models of interdisciplinary critical theories such as Critical Race Theory, with a focus on Critical Race Feminist Theory. I will also be including Critical Whiteness Studies. In this chapter we will discuss in further detail the history and formation of Critical Race Feminist Theory out of and through Critical Race Theory, as well as Critical Whiteness Studies. The use of the term 'white' in lowercase, while other racial and ethnic categories are capitalized throughout this dissertation is intentional. I am following a common approach by fellow Critical Race Theory scholars and Neil Gotanda, in which white is "better left in the lower case rather than privileged with a capital letter" as the term 'white' has typically stood for "racial domination" (Gotanda, 1991, p. 4). Black, Latinx, Asian, etc., have deep "political and social meaning as a liberating term, and, therefore, deserve capitalization" (Gotanda, 1991, p. 4).

Critical Race Feminist Theory

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was originally developed by legal scholars of Color, notably Derrick Bell, as a response and counter to Critical Legal Studies (CLS). While there was engagement in class-based analysis, there was a lack of race analysis (Bell, 1979; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT as a theory works to address the disparities in many facets of society, and, in education resources, education-focused scholars began to utilize CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to explore those disparities. CRT does not have a set statement of core tenets, however there are similar assumptions and approaches (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2009). The theory recognizes racism as an ordinary, everyday occurrence for people of color; and that the racism is deeply embedded in the social fabric of American society, infused in social structures and practices (Delgado, 1989). CRT finds that race is a contrived, social construction to categorize people according to "observable physical attributes" that do not correspond to genetic or biological reality, while acknowledging the force of the meanings and implications of race (Delgado, 1989). In order to utilize CRT in the field of education, CRT was required to evolve become more multidisciplinary (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007). CRT holds useful concepts that may be used in examining the experience of female students of Color in the United States educational system. These tenets include themes including: the centrality of racism and white supremacy in US society; a commitment to social justice; and the importance of the voices of people of color, or counter-stories, to contradict the dominant narratives (Mills 2003). Within the context of disproportionate disciplinary practices, of specific importance is the notion of white supremacy, which is described as: a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious

and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Mills, 2003). The U.S. education system may attempt to practice "colorblind" policies, however particularly with discipline, the policies affect students and communities of Color disproportionately. Gotanda (2000) contends that the concept of colorblindness is by and large contradictory; to exclude race from a decision-making process, the existence of race must first be acknowledged. He determined that color blindness is actually racially premised rather than neutral. The understanding of white supremacy as a structural phenomenon informing our work is pivotal in forcing us to develop proactive stances to address needs and concerns of communities of Color (Stovall, 2006). Where CRT works in education research, is in examining the ways power and privilege structure and shape education. This can be morphed into action and social justice, with the ultimate goal being to teach "so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds" (Greene, 1998).

CRT as a framework is often used to theorize, study, and challenge the ways race and racism directly and indirectly impact social structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). The principles of CRT acknowledge that racism exists in the daily lives of most people of Color. Attempting to maintain a "colorblind" perspective ignores the contextual conditions of historical and present-day racist practices (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT methodology gains insight into the lived experiences and perspectives of those most impacted by racism, employing one-on-one interviews and analysis of data that explores the complex implications of race biased policies and implementation strategies (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Howard, 2008). The CRT theorists, educators, and activists who all contributed to the framework of critical

research include the lived experiences of participants in research in the discussion of creating theory, notably encourage practice critical thinking and analogy in every part of the process of research and education (Duncan- Andrade & Morrell, 2008). CRT supports framing questions in a way that directly asks how influences of racist and discriminatory practices in educational and criminal systems impacted the girls' lives. This allows for thorough and honest conversation about painful topics, including of how interactions with law enforcement, educators, and family positively and negatively impacted each student.

CRT states that analysis of the law, or in this study's case the education system, cannot be neutral or objective. As race is the scaffolding that structures American society, there can be "no perch outside the social dynamics of racial power from which to merely observe and analyze" (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). One way educators and policymakers are attempting to integrate CRT into the education system is through cultural competency training being introduced in teacher-training programs. Analysis through CRT highlights the ways in which teachers can lack training and understanding of the realities of their increasingly diverse student learners (Morris, 2016). By including CRT tenets into teacher training curricula, the eurocentric "difference as deficit" or "minority education" frameworks can be challenged and, ultimately changed. Nevertheless, the lack of standardized requirements for cultural competency and the persistent "race neutral" ideology can hinder a broader application of CRT in teacher trainings (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003). Unfortunately, the cultural competency training and CRT framework often focuses on male students of Color, and ignores the struggle of female students of Color.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) present a CRT framework that can be applied to educational research that is central to the current analysis. In understanding the state of educational

inequality, racial identity and racism are central. Racism serves to protect the educational interests of the white majority and oppress the educational prospects of youth of Color. Additionally, the dynamic is further complicated by intersectionality, of gender, class, immigration status, and sexuality. Traditionally, many academics are obligated to use the common approaches to research that are confined to their field of study (Solorzano, 1998; Yosso, 2005). The centrality of racial identity within the tenets of CRT provide a tool to analyze and describe the ways in which racial identity plays a role in placement for youth of Color in the education system.

Critical Race Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory seeks to address concerns of power, oppression, and conflict for women in the United States. However, a criticism of this theory is that it is insufficient at addressing the real and theoretical needs of women of Color (Collins, 1990). "Far too many Black women intellectuals have labored in isolation and obscurity" (Collins, 1980, p. 2). CRT has faced similar criticism of addressing the needs of men of color, but missing key areas of need for women of Color. Women of Color often end up falling “between the cracks”, where they potentially become literally and figuratively invisible and voiceless (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; hooks, 1989). Scholars chose the term *critical race feminism* to serve as a blend of critical legal studies, critical race theory, and feminist legal theory. Critical race feminism (CRF) uses antiessentialism, challenging the feminist notion that there is an “essential female voice”, that there is one way all women feel about a subject (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1991). CRF argues that the essential voice tends to describe the reality of white middle- or upper-class women only, only purporting to be a representation of all women (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw proposed looking at the intersection of racial identity and gender, and how that impacts

perspectives and opinions of women of color. CRF was developed based on the need to address the discrepancy and missing spaces in the experiences between men of Color and white women. The theory addresses the complex nature of racial identity and gender with tenets of multidimensionality, while valuing abstract theorizing and how to implement concepts in practice. One such concept in practice is through storytelling and counter-storytelling for voices of color. The ability and opportunity to tell one's story is significantly important; that the in order to know oneself is through storied and lived experience. For many women of Color, writing about collective histories and experiences, or writing about "theory in the flesh," is a means of survival (Moraga & Anzaldua, 2001, p. liv). These counter-stories are a way to challenge the predominant and stereotypical stories that maintain racial privilege and inequity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical Race Feminist Theory is a crucial framework for Black girls, who have been historically marginalized and positioned as "inferior" for the color of their skin and their gender. Due to experiencing multiple marginalized identities, attempting to view issues through a single lens (e.g., gender or racial identity) is fundamentally limiting in the end (Wing, 2003; Parker & Stovall, 2004). CRF highlights how sexism compounds the way Black girls are seen as deficient when they do not match the criteria of white femininity (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2012). The politics of multiple oppressions Black females experience as a result of their racial identity, class, and gender status are connected to a history of slavery and controlling images (Collins, 2000; Hancock, 2004; Mullings, 1994; Scott, 1982). Black girls can be shaped by these controlling images, implicitly and explicitly by the media, authorities, and disciplinarians in their lives. A core function of CRF is to counter these stereotypes that box and

distort Black girls in ways that ultimately limit their ability to express their nuanced and layered humanity (Evans-Winters, 2011).

As guiding conceptual frameworks, Critical Race Feminist Theory aims: to refute dominant stereotypes surrounding Black girls that lack supporting evidence, i.e. that punitively disciplining Black girls is justified as they are inherently more violent (Chesney-Lind, 2001); demand attention on counter-narratives, distinguished from the master narrative, which provide an opportunity to see Black girls not as inherently "bad," but as thoughtful young women managing complex lives and societal institutions; attempt to better understand the experiences of Black girls to understand how mastery of their environments is enacted and personified, along with the ways the girls strive for dignity (Rios, 2011); and recognize the issues when attempting to follow singular notions of identity such as racial identity or ability or gender (Crenshaw, 1993). These concepts allow us to bring different theories, methods, and questions to recognize and discontinue racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline outcomes (Collins, 2013). In regards to the education setting, CRF encourages Black girls to turn away from teaching and learning inequities which are often reproduced in the classroom. Black girls are encouraged to view their lived experiences as valuable knowledge sources, and to dethrone the dominant, white supremacist pedagogical views in the classroom. As with CRT, CRF purports one cannot know the world until they know themselves, and seeks to assist Black girls in increasing their ease in deciphering societal institutions from multiple standpoints such as racial identity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and nationality. These young women are viewed as creators and scholars of deep understanding and knowledge, and work to produce necessary change in their lives as well as the lives of others (Gist, 2016; Morris, 2016). Brown (2009) described CRF as a disruptive,

conceptual, and theoretical lens through which scholars and practitioners can unpack and understand Black students' perspectives.

Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is an extension of CRT, that aims to focus on whiteness specifically, rather than a broader examination of racial identity. It began as a way to observe what it means to be white in the United States from Black scholars, including W. E. B. DuBois (1920), James Baldwin (2010), and bell hooks (1997). CWS interrogates the role of whiteness, and in being racially white, including the unnamed privileges, complicity, the unearned power and the act of perpetuating whiteness (King, 1997). CWS probes the invisibility of whiteness, "…problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness, arguing that in doing so whites deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics" (Matias, et al., 2014). In interrogating whiteness, one is able to identify the systems in which white people are ignorant, or deny participation. Specifically, in schools, this may include racial deficit thinking, group stereotyping, inequitable funding and biased disciplining (Matias, et al., 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Leonardo, 2009). CWS is a theoretical framework which interrogates whiteness from cultural, economic, legal, biological, and historical lenses (D'Souza, 1997; King, 1997). Matias, et al. (2014) argue a foundational ideology to CWS is understanding that "…whiteness is the underlying mechanism that maintains a racist system, and not acknowledging whiteness contributes to the permanence of race and racism" (p. 291). CWS aims to provide the tools to white people to critically examine their own racial identity. Self-reflexivity is a central principle of CWS (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017). When white educators fail to acknowledge how we are perpetuating white privilege through our work, be it teaching, counseling, enforcing discipline policies —when we disregard problematizing the

normalization of whiteness—then we are the problem. We are the ones spreading whiteness in schools (Sleeter, 1992; McIntosh, 1990; Lensmire, et al., 2013).

Critical Whiteness Studies has been described as a philosophy, as well as a tool for white people—used to facilitate understanding of themselves as racialized beings and contributing to the systems of white privilege, power and domination (Matias, et al., 2014; Helms, 1990; Degado & Stefancic, 2012). CWS demands systems be interrogated through the lens which details white supremacy as the foundation to every system which has been built. Furthermore, CWS maintains that systems are created, perpetuated, and maintained as the status quo of normal and typical (Leonardo, 2009; Matias, et al., 2014). There are six key points of CWS scholars have defined: whiteness is internalized by all (Matias & Mackey, 2016); whites have limited understanding of their role in oppressing others (Gilborn, 2005); whiteness affects all people (Kennedy, Middleton, & Ratcliffe (2005); whiteness is viewed as "normal" (Matias, 2013); whiteness should be the center of critique and transformation (Leonardo, 2013); whiteness perpetuates a racist system (Matias et al., 2014). CWS allows scholars to push against normative and static views of what it means to be white in this society and investigate how it is perpetuated (Matias & Mackey, 2016).

A dominant system of white supremacy that is sometimes overlooked is public schooling. Leonardo (2013) addresses whiteness in schools, as he describes "…we are tempted to surmise that when educators draft goals that meet the needs of all students, this audacity does not include Black, indigenous, or Latino kids" (p. 608). According to this point of view schooling is for white people, and by white people (Matias et al, 2014). To fully interrogate whiteness, one must understand the current research on white privilege and its intersection with white supremacy, discourse theory, and the structural advantage whiteness provides. Part of the process to

dismantle whiteness within education involves developing a critical white identity, and for white students and teachers to accept their white racial identity (Allen, 2004). Additionally, white students and teachers need to listen and learn from the wisdom and experiences of people of Color who are willing to share on their own terms. The process encourages the ongoing reconstruction of white identity, in which white people are not attempting to rid themselves of whiteness, and instead working against white supremacy by working with race-radical people of Color (Allen, 2004; DiAngeo, 2011; Dewey, 2007; Picca, 2015).

Chapter IV: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The goal of this dissertation was to explore how racism and zero-tolerance policies in school settings have impacted Black female students living in urban and rural environments in North Carolina. The students may experience blatant or subtle racism, systemically imposed or directly expressed to the student, throughout their lives. This study relied on qualitative approaches to identify (a) individual experiences, (b) protective factors, and (c) risk factors that may contribute to the difficulties and stressors for Black female students. This investigation detailed accounts of discriminatory practices within educational institutions that female students of Color have encountered and been required to overcome to earn an equal and equitable high school education. An outcome of the study is to explore these experiences, bring them to the forefront, and encourage education policymakers to acknowledge the impact of discriminatory education practices and discipline policies that negatively impact future educational outcomes for female students of Color.

This dissertation draws on data from interviews with Black female high school rising seniors to generate a theory describing the experience of Black female students in the North Carolina school system. In order to thoroughly describe the factors that the students report as supportive as well as the factors that students identify as barriers, this dissertation utilized qualitative methodology to center the voices of the participants as most important. A qualitative approach was essential in order to obtain the data necessary to effectively describe the experience of Black girls in the education system. Heppner et al. (2008) state that qualitative

research can help to better understand the complexity of people's lives by examining individual perspectives in context.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative approaches are often intentionally atheoretical in order to maintain openness, and to decrease the preconceived notions related to the research questions (Munhall & Chenail, 2008). Creswell (2013) offered "research traditions", a set of assumptions and common methodology in the absence of a theoretical framework. Creswell (2013) went on to identify five common traditions in qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The qualitative descriptive approach takes context without defining it, using a fundamental qualitative method for basic descriptive inquiry (Brink & Wood, 2001; Sandelowski, 2000). Creswell and Clark (2007) offer some of the assumptions of qualitative research being the "evolving design, the presentation of multiple realities, the researcher as an instrument of data collection, and a focus on participants' views". Sandelowski (2000) found that in qualitative research, the researchers frequently named a methodology and then did not adhere to the traditions of that method, or the researchers recognized their drift from research traditions and did not name a methodology at all. Sandelowski (2000) utilized the term qualitative descriptive study in order to recognize the eclectic approach to naturalistic inquiry as a legitimate and unique method of qualitative research. Creswell and Clark (2007) offer the qualitative methodology of grounded theory, which is used to create a substantive theory when current theories are inadequate or nonexistent. Sandelowski (2000) and Creswell (2006) described similar approaches, both using a combination of sampling, data collection, and data analysis consistent with qualitative research, while not adhering to a specific philosophical framework of the traditional approaches. I will be using grounded theory methodology, which uses systematic

analysis (e.g., open, axial, and selective coding) and analytic tools (e.g., constant comparison, asking questions, etc.) to build theory. During the data collection and analytic processes, the researcher continuously compared data provided by participants with their emerging theoretical concepts. This research required consistent and regular reflection on data collected and analysis, given the reliance on the historical phenomena of racism (e.g., slavery, Black Codes, desegregation, and resegregation), and how that impacts women of Color in the education system.

Qualitative research assumes that the world is highly subjective and in need of interpretation and exploration (Moustakas, 1994, Hycner, 1999). The research process is exploratory, inductive and is focused on process, without manipulating variables but observing and interpreting the students' lives in a naturalistic setting (Whisker, 2016). Generic exploratory research design is research oriented toward describing the lived experience while interpreting the "texts" of life (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). In research, often the goal of the researcher is to remain impartial and objective (Stovall, 2014). As a white woman researching the Black female experience, it is incredibly difficult and misguided to attempt objectivity or impartiality. The process of research is not neutral (Brown & Strega, 2005). Research in general and particularly this topic in this era is a "highly political endeavor with significant implications for the researcher as well as the individuals and contexts that serve as the focus of the study" (Brown, Carducci, & Kurby, 2014). I primarily used Critical Whiteness Studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) as my theoretical framework. This theory has allowed me to "critically interrogate the means by which whiteness is normalized and racism is continually reproduced" (Cabrera, 2012). Critical Whiteness Studies accepts that racism is a socially constructed reality in the United States, historically rooted in the notion of whiteness, which has time and again provided

advantages to white people and disadvantages to people of Color, and yet ultimately that white supremacy is detrimental to everyone in society at the systemic level (Baldwin, 2010; DuBois, 1999; Frankenberg, 1993; Mills, 2007). By utilizing a Critical Whiteness theoretical framework for conducting the research and analyzing the data, I am engaging in a distinctly political act by choosing where and who to research, what questions to ask, and how to conduct myself within the research. Confronting problematic views of race and embracing the pieces of myself that I bring into this work means addressing the anger that comes up in me when realizing the experiences of the Black students interviewed, and the frustration with myself for being complicit in white supremacy for much of my life. Doane (2003) writes that whiteness studies "reverses the traditional focus of research on race relations by concentrating attention upon the socially constructed nature of white identity and the impact of whiteness upon intergroup relations…[it] makes problematic the identity and practices of the dominant group."

I used Critical Whiteness Studies in addition to Critical Race Feminist Theory as the theoretical framework and lens through which I interrogated the data. Traditional values of validity, objectivity, or generalizability do not apply in the same way when guided by Critical Race Feminism Theory. Critical Race Feminism employs more of a "what we make is there" knowledge of the world as opposed to a "what there is" baseline for validity (Glesne, 2006, pp. 6-7). A Critical Race Feminist lens informed the methodology in focus and form by (a) amplifying the voices of Black girls who are often marginalized and pushed out of school settings, (b) investigating teachings and approaches for culturally competent educational possibilities that are typically removed from dominant policy discourse, and (c) reimagining positive, productive, and hopeful possibilities for Black girls and women in education.

Validity does matter in the design and analysis of this study, as a fundamental value of rigorous efforts to "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). For the purposes of this study, the validity was based on the credibility and trustworthiness of the efforts to address the experiences of female students of color, and to validate their multiple realities to counter dominant beliefs in the educational system. An interview-based method was appropriate as the majority of current studies on Black students in the Education system are based on quantitative data, which limit participants to a constrained set of statements that may or may not reflect their realities. The study was grounded in the voices of the participants, who provided insight into the many layers of this issue.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The current study used a grounded theory qualitative research design, drawing on Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Feminist Theory in order to examine the experiences and voices of Black girls in the North Carolina school system. The research questions were developed to explore the experiences of Black girls within the North Carolina school system, with an outcome of the study seeking to address how school psychologists and educators could best support Black girls in the education system.

Research Questions

1. How do Black girls in high school describe their experiences with racism and disciplinary discrepancies in the education system?
2. Where do Black girls in high school see gaps within and barriers to services and support?
3. What spaces and structures in schools support Black girls' agency and aptitude?
4. What protective factors and strengths do they feel they possess?

Participants

After receiving approval of all human subjects procedures from the University of North Carolina's Institutional Review Board, recruitment of participants commenced. I worked with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, during their summer enrichment program "Project Uplift". The participants selected were adolescent Black female students, as identified through a convenience sample (Weiss, 1994). These participants had already applied and been invited to attend the "Project Uplift" program, a summer enrichment and college access program designed to promote and increase access to higher education for all outstanding students, especially those underrepresented in post-secondary education. Participants of Project Uplift have an opportunity to attend classes, talk with professors, meet students and participate in social, recreational, and cultural events. They also learn about admissions procedures and how to afford a college education. Project Uplift is designed for students from underrepresented populations in higher education, such as American Indian, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian American backgrounds. They also welcome prospective first-generation college students, students from rural communities and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Each weekend there were approximately 15-30 Black female students. Creswell (2013) asserts there is no specific answer to the question of how many sites and participants to include in qualitative research. Patton (2002) has stated that no rule exists in qualitative research for sample size selection. Instead, "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size". Charmaz (2006) advises to cease data collection when the categories or themes are saturated, or when new data does not reveal new insights or themes. In this context, I aimed to recruit approximately 8-12 Black female students, ages of 14-18 years old to participate in the research.

During the first session of each Project Uplift weekend, I was introduced and I in turn introduced my dissertation focus and the research questions. I requested that, if a student met criteria and was interested in participating, to come and find me and provide their phone number and email address, as well as their caregiver/guardian's phone number and email address. At the end of the four weekends, I had "recruited" 23 interested participants. I sent up to three emails to caregiver/guardians, with a description of the study, permission form, and researcher contact information (see Appendix A and B). Of those emails, there were fifteen caregiver/guardians who returned my email with the permission slip signed and approval to go forward with the interview. Of the fifteen students, I was able to contact and schedule interviews with nine students who met criteria for participating in the study (Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Information (Pseudonyms provided)

Name	**School**	**Location, NC**
Akilah	Duck Brook High School	Southwest NC
Aleya	East Town High School	Southwest NC
Ashlee	Late High School	North
Jordyn	Marston Circle High School	Northwest
Alexis	Avenger Academy	Central
Bryanna	Great Hill High School	Central
Naya	Deerfield High School	Northwest
Paris	Sleepy Meadow High School	Central
Rhaven	Chatham High School	Triangle

Individual Interviews

The participants were sent the interview protocol (Appendix D) two to three days ahead of the scheduled interview, and interviews were scheduled for ninety minutes with an expected

length of sixty to seventy minutes. Interviews were conducted over Skype and Google Hangouts Video. Interviews were used to better identify how the student views herself within the context of the education system. Interviews were one-on-one, with each interview being approximately 45-90 minutes in length and based on student protocols developed for the purpose of this study. The interviews were intentionally designed to be informal, engaging, and collaborative, guided by the research questions previously stated. I utilized a prepared interview protocol (Appendix D), designed to facilitate the exploratory interviews. This protocol served as a guide, still allowing the freedom to vary, omit, or alter the questions as necessary based on the participant's sharing (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

Data was collected over a fourteen-week time period between Mid-July and Mid-October. Participants were residents of a variety of counties in North Carolina. In-depth audio recorded semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) were used to investigate "little-understood phenomena; to identify/discover important variables; [and] to generate hypotheses for further research" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). McCracken (1988) describes semi-structured interviews as "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory", and enabled me, the researcher, to "step into the mind" of my participants so that I might be allowed to "see and experience the world" as they do. As a white researcher interviewing Black students, there is no point where I will fully see or experience the world as they do. What I aim to do, is present their voices in this dissertation as clearly and wholly as I can, to pass the mic to these students. The semi-structured interviews were open-ended in nature so as to elicit stories of lived experience from the participants (Crenshaw, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Each interview was audio recorded for the development of verbatim transcripts. I took extensive effort to ensure data could not be tied to participants. I stored informed consent forms in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I selected pseudonyms for participants to be used on all data collection documents, including interview guides, field notes, and researcher memos. Pseudonyms were created for each participant in order to maintain anonymity (see Table 1). Each document was dated and labeled by participant pseudonym and type of data (e.g., 082219 rhaven interview field notes). All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Broad topics covered in the interview with the Black female adolescent participants included key academic, financial, and social/emotional supports, self-identity, academic self-concept, experiences of racism and racial microaggressions in school, racial identity development, parental socialization and peer relationships.

After listening to each of the audio recordings directly following each interview, I sent the audio-recorded narrative field texts of the interviews to a professional transcription service, Rev.com, to be transcribed verbatim, a "crucial" step in the research text composition process of inquiry (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). Upon return, each transcript was read and reviewed thoroughly at least one time and sent to the participant from the transcript. After transcriptions were completed, I destroyed the interview recordings. I maintained contact information sheets and the pseudonym key electronically in files separated from the research data. All files were encrypted, password-protected, and stored on my personal password-protected computer. Back-up copies were stored electronically on a secure, password-protected, UNC server. Participants were given time to review the transcript and correct or add to their part of the interview. Following that time period, I began the analysis process.

All electronic data followed an organized labeling system using the numeric date (date, month, year), participants' pseudonym, and the type of data (e.g., 082219 rhaven interview). I sorted recordings in an electronic folder labeled recordings until they were transcribed, saved, and backed up. I saved transcripts in a case subfolder labeled by the participants' pseudonym within a storage folder labeled raw data. I stored raw transcripts in the case subfolders. Once a transcript had been coded, I moved it to a separate series of case subfolders within a folder labeled "working data" with subfolders labeled by pseudonym. I used the "working data" subfolders to store coded transcripts, consent forms, field notes, and any other document for analysis. This organization allowed me to keep the original transcripts safeguarded from ones that have been coded so I could return to the originals throughout the data analysis and writing process. The "working data" subfolder contained a "data analysis" subfolder, where I stored the code key, charts, code matrices, and drafts.

Data Analysis

Once all interview transcriptions were completed, coding commenced. Using a method of analysis described by Moustakas (1994), based on the "methods of analysis suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975)" (pg. 121). Though Hycner (1999) cautions against using the term "analysis", as it can be interpreted as breaking ideas into parts, which could result in the loss of the phenomenon or essence as a whole. For the purpose of the dissertation, I will be referring to the process as analysis, however I attempted to the best of my ability to investigate the parts of the phenomenon while keeping the context whole. (Hycner, 1999, p. 161). I began with bracketing, in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements (Hycner, 1999). Vagle (2014) describes this process as identifying potential bias or pre-thought the researcher may have regarding the context studied, and addressing these "pre-understandings" (p. 67) so as to limit the

influence of these perspectives on the research at hand. After I completed bracketing, I began to move from field texts (data sources, e.g., recorded interviews) to research text (interpretation of experience) (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2009). I spent a significant amount of time simultaneously listening to each recorded interview while reading the transcribed field text to correct any errors there may be. Next, I read and re-read each field text looking for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes that may have developed into stories by putting the storied data into context around the experiences of these Black female students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I listed each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. Careful coding of the data allowed me to identify the emerging themes and codes (Moustakas, 1994). After coding a few interview transcripts, I compared codes for common terminology and consistency. Although I coded and analyzed each case separately, I used the same list of codes throughout all interviews, adding codes as needed. I grouped codes into categories using a process of code mapping that incorporated the conceptual framework and matched concepts that seemed to go together (Saldaña, 2016). The coding process of the interviews was aided with a categorical aggregation, as recommended by Stake (1995). I looked for connections and patterns of the emerging themes of each field text separately, as well as between and across the field texts. Wells (2011) suggests this process to find and make meaning of individual and shared storied data, in order to create an overarching story from which each participant's personal narrative as well as a shared narrative can be discovered. I coded the interview with each participant one a time so I could have a seamless understanding of each student's experience. Furthermore, I analyzed each case holistically, including all interviews, before engaging in cross-case analysis.

The first cycle of coding was based on my conceptual framework. Miles et al. (2016) described that an initial list of deductive codes could be established from the research questions

or conceptual framework. Additionally, codes and sub-codes were developed inductively. Upon completion of the interview for each participant, I wrote a research memo that summarized the interview and then I described their experience in response to my research questions.

The second cycle coding is to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). I conducted a second cycle of coding during cross-case analysis, utilizing pattern coding. The process of using pattern coding helped me group numerous codes into common patterns. Saldaña shared that pattern coding is effective for "condensing large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units" and for "laying the groundwork for cross-case analysis" (p. 236). Thus, I engaged in pattern coding to reorganize or converge codes into more meaningful categories. Patton (2015) described that data and classification systems must be reviewed and reworked so that the classification system is meaningful to the study. Finally, I engaged in "narrative smoothing", a method proposed by Spence (1986) and Kim (2016), which is a process used to make a participant's story "coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader" (Kim, 2016).

I used MAXQDA plus 12 (VERBI Software, 2015), a computer assisted qualitative analysis software, to assist with the management, organization, and coding of the data. This included (1) delineating units of meaning, (2) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (3) summarizing each interview and validating it, and (5) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (Hycner, 1999).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) asserted that rigor and trustworthiness underlie sound qualitative research. They described credibility through the following lens: researchers ask their participants whether or not their realities have been accurately described. To maintain credibility and

trustworthiness, I provided a copy of all interview transcriptions to each participant to ensure the interviews and message are accurate. Per Guba & Lincoln (1982, p. 246), the ultimate test is, "Do the data sources find the inquirer's analysis, formulation, and interpretations to be credible (believable)?" The participants had the ability and freedom to review the data analysis to ensure accuracy or make recommendations for necessary changes, to ensure their perspectives regarding the phenomenon that was studied are valid and true (Moustakas, 1994). I continued to practice bracketing myself consciously in order to understand, in terms of the perspectives of the participants interviewed, that "the focus [was] on an insider perspective" (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 70). Bracketing assists in recognizing, and making known, any assumptions and/or biases, in order to set them aside to avoid undue influence.

The trustworthiness of this study ensures that the true stories and experiences of participants are shared, allowing readers to understand the phenomenon of participant experiences as Black female students. By providing sufficient detail related to context, research design and methods, and specifying the systematic approach used to ascertain, analyze and formulate findings, readers can determine if the study is applicable to different environments, situations, or institutions. Additionally, the quality of work can be scrutinized so that the study can be duplicated and findings regarding the experiences of Black female students are confirmed to have emerged from the data. Throughout the project, the researcher documented closely and consulted research committee members to review and provide feedback in order to ensure researcher influences and biases did not impact research results. An audit trail detailing research steps taken from the start to the conclusion of the study was taken (Creswell, 2003). This allowed for research decisions and methodology to be duplicated. Secondly, transcripts were coded with preliminary observations annotated in a memo format. Participants were invited to member

check, by reviewing transcript data and analysis. This feedback, which was solicited throughout the research process, was important to ensure the researcher's understanding was a close account of the participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). After all data was collected and analyzed for developing themes, participants were invited to affirm, amend or disaffirm interview data, researcher notes, and emergent themes to indicate if model accurately reflects their stories. Participants also had an opportunity to ask clarifying questions of researcher findings.

Convenience and snowball sampling were methods used to establish credibility (Shenton, 2004). These types of sampling assist in identifying individuals who may fit research criteria. This strategy helped to ensure credibility. Participants were recruited in person and through email. Participants were informed in person and in writing of their right to leave at any time, or to discontinue participation in the study. Participants could also refuse to answer any question during the interview process. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and contribute additional ideas to the study. This strategy was used to ensure that the information shared by participants was voluntary, forthright, and honest (Shenton, 2004). In an effort to ensure information shared by participants were authentic and transparent, the researcher asked follow-up questions and clarifying responses. Participants were also asked to review interview transcripts and examine initial researcher findings to ensure accuracy of data collected. This process called "member checks" ensured that the information collected accurately reflects the participant's intention and experiences (Shenton, 2004). Member checks were completed throughout the research process. If given consent, participants had an opportunity to formally and informally review transcripts, researcher interpretations, analysis, and conclusions. Participants could affirm, amend or disaffirm interview data, researcher notes, transcript data, emergent themes, as well as researcher conclusions. This process ensured validity and accuracy

of collected information (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, it allowed participants to correct errors, exclude or challenge interpretations, and assess adequacy of data and preliminary findings. Transcript data was also continually reviewed to guard against readjusting the research question to align with participant responses. This was also accomplished by member checking. Participants could assist the researcher in ensuring reported data accurately captured participant intentions. Additional information and clarifying data could also be contributed (Charmaz, 2006). Shenton (2004) indicated that this type of action is referred to as "negative case analysis". The researcher reviewed data to ensure accuracy, reconfirm themes, and substantiate that findings relate to the phenomenon (Shenton, 2004). If permission was given, the researcher systematically engaged with participants to ensure collected data and conclusions were authentic and reflect their experience as a Black female student. At any time, participants could request to review, amend or remove data that was not an accurate representation of their interview or experience. Frequent meetings with advisors and the principle investigator also contributed to trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Guidance was sought in managing the data, identifying categories and themes, as well as honing research findings. Feedback was solicited from advisors at specific intervals during the research process. In addition to receiving supervision from experienced faculty researchers, several professional colleagues and classmates periodically reviewed the research process. Additionally, participation in periodic informal writing groups scheduled by doctoral classmates provided opportunities to share ideas, review methodology, and receive feedback on the research progress. Shenton (2004) argued that frequent meetings and discussions with superiors, peers, and colleagues provide a different perspective and help the researcher refine and strengthen the research project. "Reflective commentary" as described by Shenton (2004) involved continually evaluating the research analysis process which included

reviewing the researcher's notes to determine consistency between data, findings and final conclusions (p. 68). As part of the research methodology of this study, research notes and memos were used to track initial impressions, themes and emerging ideas. The researcher consulted with senior advisors to clarify questions and reconfirm categories and themes.

The credibility of the researcher was tantamount to the credibility of the entire research project (Shenton, 2004). Details regarding the researcher's background, professional experience, funding sources, and study approvals provided important information regarding the researcher's motive and relationship to the phenomenon that is investigated. These details contributed to the credibility of the research and ensure that findings are transferable. Transferability refers to the applicability of the results to new populations and sites (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) however acknowledged the larger debate among researchers that question the ability of some qualitative research to be transferable due to relatively small participant sizes. One strategy to mitigate the effects of a small participant sample was to provide enough detailed information that allowed the reader to draw their own inferences (Shenton, 2004). The research phenomenon and findings described in this study provided sufficient detail and evidence to assist the reader in understanding the target audience, Black female students, and their experiences. Specifically, this research gave a voice to the research questions of how Black female students experience the North Carolina school system, and what contributed to the persistence of this population. The study was bound by the target population; however, findings may be transferrable to other student populations, with similar backgrounds, attending similar institutions. Another strategy used to ensure research trustworthiness was to examine its dependability. Dependability refers to the ability to obtain the same results if the research study was duplicated (Shenton, 2004). To achieve dependability, the researcher provided an audit trail which is a detailed account of the

research design and execution (Charmaz, 2006). This in-depth account or audit trail of the investigative process allows for duplication of the research study. It is imperative when utilizing a qualitative exploratory approach that trustworthiness is established by gathering thick and rich data, that uses participant words which are systematically member-checked for accuracy, which helped to develop themes and yield conclusions that accurately and authentically answered the study questions on how Black female students experience, and what contributes to their persistence.

Saturation

Saturation was achieved when themes were comprehensive. According to Charmaz (2006), when the data yields no new themes, the same patterns continue to emerge, or the exact same comparisons are made, the research has reached saturation. Constant comparison required at each stage for interview data, themes and observations to be compared at all levels and between all interviews to gain greater awareness of themes and potential researcher influences (Charmaz, 2014). After the sixth interview, when the researcher was confident that all themes derived from the research were exhaustive, two additional participants were interviewed to ensure no new themes arise, thus helping to ensure saturation.

Finally, the researcher accounted for the findings and ensured that the information obtained was confirmed. “Confirmability” as described by Shenton (2004) included acknowledging any biases that may have influenced the research, conceding assumptions and how decision processes are made (Shenton, 2004).

In an effort to confirm the objectivity of this research project, a detailed reporting of the methodology was provided. There are several strategies used to gather and verify the data, including member checking each section, reviewing field note and memos, consulting superiors,

colleagues and peers, and creating headings and themes which created an audit trail (Shenton, 2004).

Each of these techniques and systematic approaches to gathering, analyzing and reporting research findings, allowed the authentic voices and stories of participants to be shared. Furthermore, each practice allowed the research questions of how do Black female students experience high school and what contributes to the persistence of Black female students to be highlighted.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study included adhering to the guidelines as established by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent forms were provided prior to interviews for review, and signatures were obtained before interviews began (Appendix A, Appendix B). In order to maintain confidentiality, the participants remained anonymous and were provided with a pseudonym in order to conceal their identity. Names of schools will be disguised, as will names of participants. The Informed Consent Forms for the students and their parents defined the following information: the purpose of the research; the procedures of the research; the risks and benefits of the research; the explanation that the research is voluntary; the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time; explanation of confidentiality; and the contact information of the researcher.

Confidentiality is assured to all participants. All transcripts, notes and audiotapes are stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home. Consent was obtained from all participants' parents in writing. Each participant received a letter outlining the research and a consent form for their records, as well as the consent form that the researcher will keep. IRB approval was received, and questions they had were answered and resolved.

Credibility

To establish credibility, I created a codebook with theory-driven and data-driven codes to safeguard a systemic coding process (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). Engaging in several rounds of coding of the interview transcript data ensured thorough analysis, decreasing the chance of overlooking important findings. I also engaged in peer debriefing and discussing my thoughts about the themes that emerged with a colleague who is familiar with qualitative research and the investigation topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie, Leach, & Collins, 2008).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is defined as a "process that researchers used [sic] to identify their biases, attempt to take these biases into account in their interpretations, and seek to minimize their effects on data collection and interpretation" (Gall et al., 2010, p. 350). Reflexivity is based on the idea that researchers' multiple influences can potentially affect the research process, unless they acknowledge those influences (Gilgun, 2010). Several methodologists have argued the necessity of engaging in continuous reflection and self-criticism when engaging in qualitative analysis (Pyett, 2003; Schram, 2006; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Schram (2006) states reflexivity is a heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the "self and other and of the interplay between the two" (p. 9). Additionally, autoethnography is a research tool in the education field where the researcher presents critical reflections and interpretations of personal experience. In this study, autoethnography and reflexivity allow for addressing self-reflexive questions, such as "how might my experiences of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, education, and/or religion inform my approaches to curriculum and pedagogy?" (Anderson & Herr, 2005, p. 25).

Throughout this dissertation process, I have continued to reflect on my own understanding in the form of a reflexivity journal which I used to record my own experiences. This reflexive writing was crucial to understand how my experience as a white woman in a white supremacist society has shaped my interests, successes, and provided a significant amount of privilege. I needed to attempt to understand how this research could guide and was guiding my re-thinking about my own personal experiences. By staying aware of the ways my own personal biases may potentially unintentionally influence my analysis, I utilized my reflexivity journal and conversations with colleagues familiar with the research and topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie, Leach, & Collins, 2008) in order to attempt to remove myself from the stories of my participants, by bringing my biases and assumptions to conscious level.

Research Relationships and Interactions

Developing trustworthy relationships with the participants was crucial to my research. In the critical realist philosophy, research relationships are real phenomena and must be appropriately considered in the study as they influence the quality of data (Maxwell, 2012). I understood the participants would not automatically trust me and might hesitate to fully express themselves. For all the participants, I was of a different racial identity and had to demonstrate that I was trustworthy and capable of grasping their experiences. I managed this by being authentic, actively listening, and showing an interest in their experiences. If I sensed they were holding back or trying to say things "correctly", I would ask follow-up questions to give them opportunities to clarify their perceptions or emotions. The conceptual framework also helped create conditions that allowed for building trust.

Additionally, I recognize the inherent power differential between participants and myself. I am (much) older than they are, and I may have been perceived of middle or upper

socioeconomic class. My role as a researcher also puts me in a position of power. Maxwell (2012) has shared that this dynamic should not be underestimated, and must be accounted for in the research process. The power differential reveals the importance of treating participants with dignity and respect. I tried to be mindful not to attempt to shape their impressions about racial identity and discrimination by asking leading or presumptuous questions. Furthermore, with a position of power and as a mandated reporter, I also assumed a level of responsibility for the participant. For example, I was prepared to step out of my role as a researcher and take appropriate action to care for the participants' health and well-being by contacting the participant's parent or guardian if a participant was overcome with emotion or expressed self-harm. Fortunately, I did not have to do this for any participants.

Additionally, I have over seven years of professional experiences that have led me to establish rapport with adolescents of different racial identities and ethnicities from underserved and marginalized families, including as a psychology practicum student at a psychiatric hospital, correctional facility, therapist at residential and outpatient therapy programs, services coordinator on Skid Row, and graduate assistant for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UNC Chapel Hill. I understood that building trust does not happen immediately and cannot be forced (Berger, 2013). Thus, I took an interviewing approach that was authentic, respectful, caring, and patient.

Chapter V: Findings

Introduction

The major findings from the study will be presented in this chapter. The demographic information of the participants will be provided, as well as general and detailed descriptions of the themes found within the data. Chapter IV (Methodology) described the process of data analysis throughout the study. The research analyzed and found codes from the participants' responses within the interviews. These early codes were then utilized to form meaning units and a codebook for reanalysis of the data. The further analysis provided general themes that describe the experiences of the Black female adolescent students, and direct passages from the interviews are used to establish the themes. Three major themes developed from the study, which provided answers for the research questions. The primary questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. **How do Black girls in high school describe their experiences with racism in the education system?**
2. **Where do Black girls in high school see gaps within and barriers to services and support?**
3. **What spaces and structures in schools support Black girls' agency and aptitude?**
4. **What protective factors and strengths do they feel they possess?**

The collective findings revealed themes and categories that captured participant experiences. The three main themes are: (1) *White Supremacy,* (2) *Intersectionality,* and (3) *Resilience and Strength*. I will be using Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Feminist Theory to analyze the themes. The first segment will discuss *White Supremacy*. There is not a space in the United States that is not festering with white supremacist ideals (Liu, 2017; Schein, 2018; Lancaster, 2012). The education system is no different, and this segment will examine the ways in which whiteness infiltrates curriculum, teacher and peer attitudes, and racial demographics of the classroom. The second segment, *Intersectionality,* will consider the ways racial identity, gender, and social identities interact and connect within the Black girls, and how that weaves into their experiences in the educational institutions they are enrolled in (Crenshaw, 1991). Finally, in the third segment, *Resilience and Strength*, I will discuss the numerous examples in which the Black girls have shown resiliency, and how the key players (parents, teachers, school personnel, etc.) in their lives have nurtured that capability (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Paul & Araneo, 2019). Resilience is often seen as a positive trait; however, it is born from adversity and crisis. This segment will also consider the potential psychological, mental, and physiological consequences these girls may face if they continue to work as diligently and intensely as they have been in order to prove they can succeed.

Over the months of analyzing the stories of all participants, codes and themes began to emerge. Each individual story provided better insight into how these girls managed their daily lives as Black females schools in North Carolina. The three most noticeable intersecting identities for these participants were their racial identity, gender, and advanced coursework. These identities significantly impact their experiences in North Carolina learning environments.

Brief biographical descriptions of each research participant are provided prior to the findings by theme.

- Akilah – a 17-year-old Black female attending a fairly diverse high school for the county in which she lives. In 2018, there were 1.48 times more white residents (505k people) in her county in Northwest NC than any other racial identity or ethnicity. There were 341k Black or African American residents and 148k Hispanic or Latino residents, the second and third most common racial or ethnic groups. Many of the high schools in Akilah's county are approximately 9% people of color and 90% white, and Akilah says her high school is actually about sixty percent Black, twenty percent white, and twenty percent Asian or Indian. Despite this, Akilah is sometimes the only Black girl in her honors and AP classes. Previous schools she attended through middle school had a predominately white student body. When asked why she wanted to participate in this study of the Black female experience in North Carolina schools, Akilah responded she had been noticing that it was a "problem" that there are so few Black students in her advanced classes.
- Aleya – a 17-year-old Black female attending a diverse high school in Southwestern NC where she lives. In 2018, there were 1.48 times more white residents (505k people) in her county than any other racial identity or ethnicity. There were 341k Black or African American alone and 148k Hispanic or Latino residents. Many of the high schools in Aleya's county are approximately 90% white and 9% people of color. At Aleya's current school, the racial breakdown is eighty-five percent Black, nine percent Hispanic/Latinx, and one percent white.

Aleya was aware of her racial identity and feeling "different" when she first began attending school. She remarked that, because she's dark skinned, she was bullied sometimes about it at school. For Aleya, growing up she did not attend any predominately white institutions (PWIs). Her middle school was a lottery entrance school, and Aleya felt it was more mixed. At her current school, she says everyone knows it is a predominately Black high school and students are very motivated for college. When asked why she wanted to participate in this study, Aleya responded "I just I really like talking about this… just because I like to think about things. I like to execute things, and actually think about them and put them together."

- Ashlee – a 17-year-old student in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program in northern North Carolina. The population in her city is 41.9% white, 40.4% Black or African American, and 8.7% Hispanic or Latinx. Ashlee identifies as "mixed": her mother is white and her father is Black. She reports her experience is school has also been fairly mixed, that she has attended predominately white schools and more diverse schools. From kindergarten, she has been in majority white classes.
- Jordyn – a 17-year-old student attending a predominately white high school in northwest North Carolina. The population of her city is 82.5% white alone, 5.88% Black or African American alone, and 5.5% Two or More Racial Identities. For Jordyn, all the schools in her county are predominately white. When asked why she was interested in being a part of this study, Jordyn said it was largely based on her community and where she lives. She feels she can't say anything about her experiences, and it is an opportunity to finally be heard. "There's always two sides

of the story, but with this interview, I guess I'm telling my side of the story. You have to listen. You have to be open-minded, and just listen to what I have to say, because I feel like I never am understood. I never am listened to when I'm trying so hard. I'm trying so hard in the nicest way, just try to get my point across, and just can never ... it just never is, I guess."

- Alexis and Bryanna – sisters living in central North Carolina. Alexis is 17-years-old, and Bryanna is 16-years-old. The population demographics of their area are 74.2% white alone, 8.4% Black or African American alone, and 7.42% Asian alone. They are in the same grade, as Bryanna skipped a grade. However, they attend different schools. Alexis attends a private school where the student body is 179 students: 62% Asian, 17.9% Pacific Islander, 14% white, and 6.1% Black. Bryanna attends a public high school, where the student body is 1,914 students: 59% white, 21% Black, 14% Hispanic/Latinx, 3% Asian, and 3% two or more racial identities.
- Naya – a 17-year-old living in one of the largest city in North Carolina, located in the northwest. Her city is 45.9% white alone, 34.3% Black or African-American alone, and 14.9% Hispanic or Latinx. The high school she attends is not a predominately white school. The racial breakdown of the study body is 39.6% Black or African American, 35.8% White, and 17.2% Hispanic or Latinx. Despite this, Naya tends to be one of the few Black students in her advanced classes. Naya remarks the classes tend to be smaller, and a lot less diverse. "Maybe one or two Black people in there and then the rest are just white". Naya transferred to this

school her sophomore year. The schools she attended before were predominately white, and she found she was usually the only Black girl in her class.

- Paris – an 18-year-old living in central North Carolina, and attends a high school with just over 2,000 students. The population of her city is 75.3% white alone, 14.4% Black or African American alone, and 4.81% Hispanic or Latinx. Her school is a predominately white school, with the racial breakdown being 59.4% white, 23% Black, 12% Hispanic/Latinx, 2% Asian, and 3.7% two or more racial identities. Paris moved to her city when she was in third grade. Before moving, she had lived in a different county which was predominately Black. She had been very used to being around people who looked like her. Paris said it was very different and somewhat difficult to get used to being surrounded by white people.
- Rhaven – a 17-year-old living in the Triangle area, and attending a magnet school. Her school is 50% white, 30% Black, 16% Hispanic/Latinx, 2% Asian, and 2% two or more racial identities. Her city's demographics are similar, 58% white, 29% Black or African-American, 4.6% other racial identity, 4.5% Asian, 3% two or more racial identities. Before her current magnet school, she attended a different high school which was in a "much worse" area, predominately Black, and also a low performing school. Her education was pretty diverse until seventh grade, when the class splits paths and some students went to advanced courses and others went to the "common core" classes. At that time, Rhaven started noticing the lack of diversity in her specific classes. She's now in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program at her magnet high school.

Introduction: Description of Themes

The participants' responses to the individual interview questions brought to the forefront three main themes, which are: (1) white supremacy, (2) intersectionality, and (3) resilience and strength. This section of the dissertation will delve deeper into each of the main themes, while uncovering and exploring the subthemes within the main themes.

Theme 1: White Supremacy

Throughout history, scholars have defined white supremacy in a few different ways. According to J.M. Jones, as cited by Sue (2016: "White supremacy is a doctrine of racial superiority that justifies discrimination, segregation, and domination of persons of color based on an ideology and belief system that considers all other non-White group inferior". Sue (2015) explains that white supremacy is different from individual acts of racism because it goes beyond just one single person and lives on through the "institutional and cultural foundations of our society." DiAngelo and Sensoy (2017) use a similar, but broader definition of white supremacy: "White supremacy…. [is the term used] to capture the pervasiveness, magnitude, and normalcy of white privilege, dominance, and assumed superiority" (143). Leonardo (2004) states white supremacy is the system white people have created and maintained to ensure white people continue to have said privileges. The systemic and institutional racism Black people in the United States experience on a consistent basis is due to the white supremacy the United States was founded on and continues to implement. Whiteness and white supremacy are not just Alt-Right, tiki torches, and MAGA hats. White supremacy is also the "natural" order of society (Delgado & Stefancic 2001, 76-77; Lipsitz 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2019), that which we consider "normal" or "typical", which is often captured in white racial dispositions, performances, and ideals, in white racial habitus, and white cultural capital.

Akilah began to notice forms of white supremacy in the classroom and her community after the 2016 election. She reported the region of North Carolina where she lives, it is not surprising or atypical to see Confederate Flags flying and “Trump” and “MAGA” signs posted with full support. In October 2017, political scientist Cathy J. Cohen and her colleagues at the University of Chicago reported findings from their *GenForward Survey of Millennial Attitudes on Race in the U.S*, and found that across all racial groups, Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 believe that racism is one of the three most important problems in the United States today and that this problem is getting worse (Medenica, 2018). Throughout the 2016 Presidential election, surveys and studies found that children of Color were expressing a great deal of anxiety, stress, fear, and anger about the election and general population’s reaction to Trump. Children were reporting difficulty sleeping, difficulty staying focused in school, and experiencing a disconnect in school belonging and community belonging in the school system. Akilah discussed the experiences she has had in the community and in her school.

> I think if you go anywhere outside of Charlotte in North Carolina, you are going to see that North Carolina is very rural and very racist. Not saying that there's not racist people in Charlotte because there are. I do see Confederate Flags and stuff like that, but as far as blatant racism to my face at school, I've actually never had to deal with that because frankly people do not like to talk about it. At my school, there are white kids who I know that don't really agree with everything I do politically, but at the same time I don't think they all think the same and I don't think they are necessarily racist. They might have subtle white girl questions or just be ignorant in that mindset. But just blatant like maybe calling people the N-word or just things like that, that are like, "Okay wow, so you're racist." That has never happened to me personally.

Akilah said she felt lucky that her school was a bit more diverse, and stated she thinks that might be why she hasn't experienced as much racial tension and racism overtly. It is a thought and worry that stays fairly present for her, though. She reported she wants to stay aware of what people are saying around her and about her, and only speaks up when she feels it is a safe place for her to do so.

Ashlee worries the teachers and administration do not realize the things that make Black students uncomfortable, because they are not allowed to talk about it. They have to "act like it's not happening" to keep the peace and ensure "white people are comfortable". As it stands now, Ashlee feels like she has to walk on eggshells around those types of topics. Additionally, Ashlee wants to address white privilege, and have conversations about the current issues the community and world are facing:

> I think a lot of people are hesitant to even admit that white privilege is real. I think the hardest part is that there's always people who think they know what they're talking about but have no idea what they're talking about. As soon as I even (bring) up white privilege, I'm like, "Oh, this is a mistake." They (are) just not receptive to it at all. There were a lot of (students) that believed that the wage gap isn't real. Wow. What planet do you guys live on? To me, it's the same thing as people believing global warming isn't real. I don't know how you can deny something that has facts and statistics to back it up, but they're very good at it. I think, at that point, it became very apparent to me that, even bringing up points, even people understanding what I'm saying, doesn't mean that they're going to be receptive to it. They can be like, "Oh, that's your experience, but that doesn't make it right." Which, to me, is like there's nothing I can do at that point. You're just going to believe what you want. But, I think the most difficult part is always people who will be

ignorant towards a subject and not even receptive to hearing it at all and people who will hear you and say they understand but then do nothing going forward.

In the classroom and since 2016, Ashlee has found herself wanting more discussion, both about politics and other difficult or complicated topics:

> Teachers are hesitant to allow us to have those kinds of conversations, because they think that it's going to become ... I don't really know what they think. That it's just going to become too much of a heated discussion, or that we don't know what we're talking about. But, in reality, I think this is the time where most of our opinions are still valuable. If we're not using that and if we're not facilitating discussion, then people who are close-minded are going to keep being close-minded. I think a lot of changing what goes on at the school is in changing the dialogue that we're allowed to have, because I think, if we were able to talk more and if people were able to understand different perspectives, then we would have a more holistic understanding of how the school should work or what people are envisioning would be best for them. I think there should be a greater acceptance of kids wanting to discuss things that are happening in current times. I don't think everything needs to be cut and dry "This is the curriculum," because then it feels like the school isn't something you belong to. It's just like you just go, and you learn about stuff you probably don't care about because they're forcing you to take the classes. And then you leave.

In education and psychology, often the “norms” on which evidence-based practices are built upon are white, upper-middle class participants. These dominant practices and ideas often go unspoken and unquestioned, precisely due to the nature of dominance. This is explained in the concept of hegemony, a process based on one group’s domination and ascendancy which places

the group as “the norm” in society. Originally, hegemony was in reference to class, however it has applications to racial identity and other social dimensions, due to the descriptions of unequal power dynamics being invisible. A dominant group’s control within a society can be referred to as the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology can be difficult if not impossible to avoid, and as a result, the subordinated groups give consent to these ideas and practices because they are naturalized and unquestioned (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). By maintaining this control within dominant discourse and societal structures, the power remains with the dominant group through cultural and educational institutions (Burman, 2016). By being the only ones with the authority and resources to create and approve knowledge, the dominant group is able to create and confirm what is the “right” information (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Those people and groups outside of the norm can mimic, imitate, and reproduce the knowledge, but the unique knowledge held by groups being “othered” is always measured against the dominant group’s established standards. Within the education system, the dominant group decides how and what knowledge is taught, ensuring that white cultural capital continues to encourage and promote the dominant group closer to power. Bryanna and Alexis have both experienced being the only Black girl in the class, as well as the only Black student. In Alexis’ school, there are eleven Black students, and four Black girls in the whole school. For Alexis, her feeling “othered” started at a very young age:

> My first time was I was in kindergarten and these boys said that I couldn't play with them because I was Black. I didn't really understand it so I told my mom and then they got in trouble later, but I didn't really understand it.

Bryanna similarly experienced significant racial distress and internal conflict at an early age:

> Growing up in a classroom like that, I knew I was different from the beginning but it was like in my family too, I've always been the darkest sister or whatever. I've always been

the darkest one in the classroom. People will say things like, "Oh, Bryanna I can't see you with the lights off." And stuff like that. When I would go home I would try and scrub off some of the dirt off my skin and stuff that they said I probably just needed to wash better and stuff like that.

Bryanna has grown with these students and has known her classmates for many years, and feels she is comfortable with them now, though she is unsure of how she would feel with a new group of classmates:

> Now if I walk into a room full of white people that I don't know then I'll be uncomfortable. But since I've known these people for literally ten plus years, it's like fine because I know that they're people. They still have some sort of care for me and at least I know them. It's not that uncomfortable for me. But if I were to walk into ... I went to church with my friend and we were the only two black people there and there were a bunch of teens. I was just like, "Are you serious right now?" There's this white boy and he was saying the N word and people ... they were just like laughing at it and stuff. He thinks it's okay. He thinks it's funny. And there's all these other white people around. It just made me uncomfortable.

For Ashlee, this difference between her classmates and herself was apparent. Being the only Black girl and sometimes only Black student in a class or educational program was reportedly very “othering”. Othering is not about liking or disliking someone. It is based on the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favored group (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Ashlee said she experienced this in subtle and overt ways:

> I guess I always kind of knew ... I guess I was always kind of aware of it, maybe not as hyper-aware as I am now, but, even when I was younger, I didn't always feel like I

> completely fit in in places like that… I feel like, when I started becoming aware of like politics and stuff like that, I started to pick up on more of things that didn't upset me before when I wasn't aware of it. I kind of looked at it through a new lens. Like, when I used to wear my hair natural when I was like in middle school. Just kind of the whole events that would follow that that weren't the same as if a white person changed their hair or something like that. I just became kind of more aware that stuff like that wasn't the most appropriate, whereas before I didn't really notice. "They would not have said this to that person over there." Right?

Throughout her education, Ashlee was aware of the disparities of enrollment in her classes. She said she noticed how some of the other Black students in her program have tried to "fit in" with the white students, and the questions that come up for her:

> Encountering other Black women in particular that constantly have their hair straight and who I've never seen with it curly, it makes me wonder a little bit if they just like the way their hair looks straight, or if they feel like ... it's particularly with Black women who are in the same classes with me who hang out with all white people. So, I kind of have to wonder. Do they feel pressured to fit in in that sense? Because, really, that's the ... You're not going to bleach your skin. Really that's as close as it's going to get to feeling like you fit in. So, I don't know. That's something that I've had to navigate as I've gotten older. Having to unpack those kind of things. Those kind of inner conflicts.

White supremacy is always changing because what it means to be white is malleable and unstable. In the late 1800's, this fluidity in who was "white and right" was seen in public health inspections of immigrants coming to the United States. Public health inspectors would pick out the people they thought looked peculiar, had the capacity for "lunacy, criminality, or promiscuity

or looked ugly" (Baynton, 2016). Italians, Slavs, and Jewish and Irish people were eyeballed for their ability to bolster the economy and were either sent back or stigmatized. Those stereotypes said Italians were prone to violence because of their ties to mafias. They couldn't control their tempers and were associated with feeblemindedness, like Slavs. Jewish people were assumed to have poor physiques and were greedy. Irish were characterized as alcoholics who were vulnerable to insanity. Within institutions white supremacy is often understood as an invisible system that both covertly and overtly recognizes, validates, and prioritizes white people while simultaneously disadvantaging people of Color (DiAngelo 2011). Additionally, individuals do not have to be 'white people' to actively reinforce and act in the interests of whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Whiteness and white supremacy create the "model minority" phenomena. Along with the accusation of "acting white", the participants mention being told they're "not like other Black people" or, more offensively, "one of the good ones". Whiteness lives at an intersection between privilege and identity.

The United States education system has remained stuck in a traditional and privileged educational model, which claims to evolve with the students' needs but is actually trapped and thrives in white supremacy. Gillborn (2014) led a critical race analysis of American schools and education reform and concluded "education is one of the principal means by which white supremacy is maintained and presented as normal in society" (p. 26). In this context, the sweeping consequences of the mis-education of Black students are evident within school funding inequities, teacher education, public policy/reforms, and the school-to-prison pipeline. There may be a widespread desire to diminish and ameliorate the deleterious effects of mis-education on the Black student population through well-intentioned measures to close the achievement gap and be "diverse and inclusive", however that often translates to asking the Black students to

assimilate to their white peers. Conversely, addressing the inequities of racism from an early, educational context has far reaching implications in terms of combatting the dynamics of racism in U.S. society.

Being in a school in a predominantly white classroom exposed the Black girls to the harsh realities of the racial/cultural hegemonic practices regularly present through various structures of the school environment. For instance, the majority of the girls in this study acknowledged they had few, if any, teachers of color during their entire K-12 schooling experience. As discussed in the literature review, the majority of teachers in the United States are white women. Despite a rapidly diversifying student body, teachers in North Carolina schools are disproportionately white. In the 2016-17 school year, 80 percent of North Carolina's roughly 94,000 public school teachers were white. Although Black children make up a quarter of all public school students in North Carolina, Black teachers comprise just 14 percent of teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018). Akilah had an atypical experience, that most of her teachers in elementary school were Black. She had a Black teacher in second, third, and fourth grade, and when she transitioned to middle school and then high school, it was rare for her to have a Black teacher. Akilah recognized her experience, and "I feel blessed that that was my situation. I loved all of them and I can appreciate now having a Black teacher that you like, of course, definitely helps. I feel like they all taught me what I need to know to be successful." She acknowledged she has friends who attend other schools or private schools who have never had a Black teacher. Conversely, when she has had white teachers, there have been times when she felt she needed to be more careful in how she spoke and behaved based on how the educator was treating Black students generally. She found some of the white teachers she has had were less patient with the

students, or had a “short fuse in general”. Black students would get in trouble more quickly, or be sent away to the administrator’s office, which Akilah found frustrating. Akilah spoke of a conversation she had with a teacher when she was in eighth grade:

> I didn't have any black teachers but there was one black teacher in the entire eighth grade. I actually went up to her and asked her at the end of the year, I said, "What does it feel like being the only black teacher in the entire eighth grade?" I went to a big middle school so … I thought that was crazy. And she told me that it was frustrating because she feels like her fellow teachers probably couldn't understand maybe why the kids were acting the way they were, or that they couldn't really relate to them or they were impatient with them. I was like, "Yeah, I noticed that."

Aleya reported she has had two Black male teachers throughout her education career. Her pre-k and sixth grade teachers were both Black men. For Aleya, no matter what racial identity or ethnicity her teacher is, she feels like she has to prove herself sometimes:

> It's more like when I get a black-female teacher, I feel like I'm more motivated to do what I need to do. Instead of having a white teacher, it's kind of normal. It's just, I go in there, I do my work, and I get out. Because that's just... if I have a white teacher and we talk about black issues going on in the world or something. I make it known that I'm educated on whatever we're talking about. Just so they won't get beside themselves, because that happens a lot in the school system.

Jordyn realized she had not had a Black teacher in the classroom. There are two Black teachers at her school, but she has not had any classes with them. She sees them in the hall and she said they seem nice enough. Jordyn said she felt like she would be more understood if she had a Black teacher. While she has teachers who will stop discrimination and racism in the

classroom, but that if she had a Black teacher that would it feel different in the classroom. Even with her peers, she feels more comfortable around her Black peers:

> It's kind of bad, but it's like we all kind of click together. There's not very many of us. There's some that have their own friend group, but the majority of my friends are Black, and it's the few that go to my school, which I guess you could say ... I have a lot of Caucasian friends, as well, but it's just like I don't really click as well, because I feel like I'm not understood. And it's like oh, if I experience one thing, and they've never experienced it, I just don't know how I can talk to you about it, or we can ... You'll never understand. Not very many things in common or similarities, I guess you could say.

Aleya reported feeling blessed and excited about her predominately Black school and the Black educators, and what those educators have been able to do for the school community. Her AP US History teacher recently worked with her to create an African-American Studies course in the school curriculum. The teacher went to a training in order to build the curriculum, and this Black educator told Aleya most of the teachers who taught it were white. At Aleya's high school, there are many Black teachers with a "sprinkling" of white teachers. Aleya reports there are still some teachers who do not want to teach African-American studies. She said those teachers don't realize how important it is to the students:

> I had to enroll early (for the course), because everybody was talking about enrolling into it. So, I did my schedule early- Everybody was pretty excited, and they're making it an Honors course. It's not just another class. It's not just another biology.

Aleya brought up this teacher who created this course throughout the interview, and expressed appreciation of this teacher being Black driven, and that she has pushed the subject more than it was supposed to be pushed in the textbook.

Ashlee reported she had to quit one of her extracurriculars due to some of that favoritism and attention the white teacher was showing towards only the white students. She found that since she was not one of the students that the teacher preferred, she was frequently looked over and judged harshly. While teachers sometimes have favorites and one would hope they would do a better job of staying fair, Ashlee noted it was an apparent divide of favorites between the white students and the Black students. Additionally, some of the teachers will invite those favorite students to their house. Ashlee has noticed that kind of relationship has typically been occurring between white teachers and white students. Jordyn realized she had not had a Black teacher in the classroom. There are two Black teachers at her school, but she has not had any classes with them. She sees them in the hall and she said they seem nice enough. Jordyn said she felt like she would be more understood if she had a Black teacher. While she has teachers who will stop discrimination and racism in the classroom, but that if she had a Black teacher that would it feel different in the classroom. Bryanna and Alexis had suggestions for how their schools could improve the curriculum and interactions between teachers and students, and agreed more Black teachers would be beneficial. Alexis said:

> Hiring good black teachers. That's the only thing I can think of. Black women can teach like no other person I've ever ... I've seen videos of teachers teach and it's just unbelievable. I feel like if there were Black teachers that people would love them, especially because being Black is kind of cool. If they had a Black teacher it's like I feel like the classroom being more united and stuff because people would like the teachers.

Nearly all of the Black girls admitted the curriculum taught at their schools rarely focused on the narratives of communities of color or women. Several of the participants felt that their unique stories were left untold, and often were missing almost entirely from representation in

their class lessons. Most of their Social Studies and English Language Arts curriculum omitted the diverse experiences of People of Color, especially Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, and women. When Black stories are acknowledged, they often centered on negative events (e.g., slavery, segregation) instead of illuminating the numerous contributions Black people have made to society. These moments can lead to immense tension and feelings of discomfort for the Black female students, along with feelings of invisibility (when the stories and culture are erased or omitted), and hypervisibility (when the stories are focused on the negative events, or when the focus is on Black History Month repeats, e.g. MLK Jr and Rosa Parks). Classrooms often focus on the whitewashed United States History, and ignore the importance of Black people and their contributions to society and the economy, beyond slavery.

The school curriculum in the United States leads students of Color to believe that the life experience and knowledge they have are not valued. Particularly in history textbooks (Alenuma-Nimoh, 2016; Gay, 2002), the experiences of their people are either entirely erased or they are presented in a way that leads to "contempt and pity" (Au, Brown, Calderón, & Banks, 2016, p. 2). History courses in particular have the opportunity to equalize racial, ethnic, class, and gender differences by endorsing the knowledge of a democratic education which can create a sense of community (Gay, 2002; Gay, 2010). Almost every participant in this study found that their courses typically neglected to teach culturally relevant topics and activities, and instead focused on white men. This male-dominated, Eurocentric view not only dismisses the stories of people of Color and women, but also further marginalizes the high-achieving Black girls in their classroom environments. Their unique stories are seen as auxiliary, not to be trotted out except for special occasions or Black History Month. Akilah acknowledged frustrations about the surface level history lessons in school. She wanted the history to go deeper, and focus less on the "obvious"

often repeated lessons on Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, surface level slavery in which the educators often used deficit language ("slaves" as opposed to "enslaved people"). She felt annoyed in classes that they did not recognize that Black history did not start with slavery. Akilah commented that, in her experience, Black history in the classroom and beyond in the United States appears to be centralized around slavery and does not take into account the incredible contributions, and rich history prior to the United States being founded. Akilah became animated at this point, exclaiming "…there are so many things that happened in between that [slavery] that Black people contributed to society, and just helped like pretty much build our economy in this country. So, it's just more frustrating that I feel like we weren't getting the credit we deserved." She laments that there are just so many more people and so many more achievements that she feels are left out.

Ashlee's dad was a history teacher for a while, and Ashlee laughed when she said he is and always has been very into Black culture, Black history, and political and historical topics. Ashlee says she never had a choice in learning about the real Black history, as her parents always taught her the truth and tried to provide her with plenty of facts. They regularly visited Black history museums and had discussions about racial identity. She has had far more white teachers than Black teachers, though she has had several over the years. However, since being in high school, she has not had one. Despite that, she has had some teachers that acknowledged the bias and surface level lessons in US history. She has seen some students and teachers, though, who she says are willing to downplay certain things as far as slavery or things having to do with that topic:

> They're more willing to kind of just... Not really brush past it, but we don't really talk in-depth about the events that took place. It's more of just 'this is what happened'. That's it.

> It's like a part of the course rather than being like its own thing. I find that more people buy into anything that will make them not feel guilty as I get older.

Bryanna remarked on her experiences in history class:

> When they're talking about slaves and African slave trade in History class, that's the most awkward thing. You know people will be glancing at you and stuff. They'll just look at you out of the corner of your eye and see what you're looking like. I just like ... I don't know. Just awkward. It's not like I make it awkward though, it's just awkward. The whole class is awkward. And I feel like people are walking on eggshells.

Paris has noticed the lack of depth in United States history in her courses:

> Only this upcoming year they're just now incorporating an African-American History class at my school. I've signed up for it. I've signed up for it since 10th grade, and I've never gotten it. They have one teacher teaching African-American history, it's probably going to be for one period of the day.

In the other history courses at her school, Paris has been frustrated that the shortest month of the year is spent focusing on civil rights and slavery. She started learning more about Black history over the past year:

> I learned (real history) I think it was this last year or in ninth grade. Right when I started high school, I think. My mother started her doctorate program and she's been reading like different books about actual African-American history, and not whatever they teach us in school. She encouraged my sister and I to start reading about our history. And so that's what we started to do. It's been brought up in (family) conversation, but we haven't really gone in depth a lot about it. We've had maybe a few deep conversations about actual African-American History, but it hasn't been brought up recently, of what I remember. (at

school) They bring up the triangular trade system, slavery, and then it jumps to the 1950s, and the Civil Rights movement. And then that's it.

When Akilah was in fifth grade, she was placed in "Talented Development", which was the highest achieving classroom. She noticed she was the only Black girl in the class, and one of three Black students. Akilah realized in hindsight that she was the only Black girl in the class, and it got her wondering why the advanced classrooms had fewer Black students than the "standard" or remedial classrooms, which appeared to be predominately Black. Additionally, Akilah noticed that she has been with the same few Black students from year-to-year in her advanced classes. When they are doing things for National Honor Society or AIG, it is always the same few Black students with her. She acknowledges the other students are more fluid and she meets more new and different white people at each of the Honors and AP level activities, and that it's always "the same small group of Black students".

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) reports that increasing access to educational opportunities for all students is a strategic priority. In May of 2009, 58% of the IB Diploma Program candidates were White/Non-Hispanic. 15% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 13% Hispanic/Latinx, 10% Black/Non-Hispanic, and 4% other. 84% of IB Diploma Program candidates were not eligible for free and reduced-price lunches, meaning only 16% were eligible. In 2017, the IBO launched the IB Excellence and Equity (E2) Initiative, aimed to support the IB World Schools in the United States to fully reflect their diversity and academic excellence. Schools were selected to participate in E2 to enroll low-income students and students of Color (International Baccalaureate Organization, retrieved 2019). Despite these efforts, IB program students continue to be predominately white, higher-income students. Ashlee acknowledged the segregation between the AP and IB programs and the "regular" school:

> I know they're trying to get more people of color to sign up for AP and IB classes and things like that, but I think that is difficult when they don't feel welcome in those environments. I'm honestly not really sure what can be done at a high school level, but I feel like the only time my school really comes together is football games or like sports or like a pep rally or something where we have to acknowledge that we all go to the same school instead of acting like it's two completely different schools in one. I mean, I feel like it has to be facilitated by the administration or something like that, because kids aren't going to come together by themselves. Maybe if the circumstance and the situation was provided for them to interact. You're not going to get them to branch out unless you're in classes where they're surrounded by those other students.

These changes and initiatives at a high school level are too late, according to Ashlee:

> Most of the kids in my classes are still white. In most of student council, NHS, a lot of things like that, a lot of honor societies, any kind of clubs or programs like that, it's still majority white. I'm not really sure what we can do to change that, but there's definitely a lot of more representation for the white kids that go to my school than the Black kids. I mean, I guess a lot of people would say that that's a choice, like to join those things, but I think there's definitely a fault in that argument. There are several faults in that argument. I think people don't understand that bridging the gap can't take place when you're in high school. It's too late. A lot of those injustices that kind of just keep happening in the education system, especially when we're younger, not all those can be rectified when we're old enough to make our own choices, because a lot of that informs what we think is appropriate for us to do. So, if no one ever told you that you had the potential to be in higher level classes or that you needed to do these things to put them on your resume or

> because you liked them, then you're not going to do them. And there's no amount of advertising it that's going to make people see past that if it's been a continual occurrence in their life, basically. I think a lot of people don't really understand that depth that is the gap, especially between black and white students, especially at this age. And, of course, people are going to cling to who looks like them, who they know, that kind of thing, but even more than that, I feel like there's not much being done to kind of fix the discrepancies that even the other students can see.

Ashlee noted the discrepancy in how the students are disciplined, or not, as well. She has noticed at her own school, that students are not allowed to leave school for lunch, and she's seen many white students leave without getting into trouble, while administration closely monitors the Black students. Additionally, she remarked her dad recently started working at a new school, and he was a part of a push for more regulation and discipline, as students were doing whatever they wanted. Parents of white students were, at first, very on board with the changes he was making and the rules being put in place. They wanted administration to dress code sagging pants, wearing hats, bandanas, and more racially driven dress coding. When he began enforcing the dress code practices that impacted the white students, the parents complained and wanted to let the white students wear what they wanted to. Her dad told them, "if I'm not dress coding them, I'm not dress coding anyone". Ashlee noted that in their county and in regards to school practices:

> Everybody knows that basically, if you complain about something, they'll stop enforcing it. But, the difference is that most of the times when those kinds of groups mobilize it's the white parents and not the black parents. So, in that sense, there's a lot more that they're allowed to get away with that they shouldn't be necessarily.

These initiatives need to start taking place earlier, according to Ashlee. Students of Color need to be included early in their education and considered for academically rigorous courses. This would mean considering the barriers in place for some families. Educators are often told not to work harder than their students, however students and families may not know what they need to do or could be doing. It is not necessarily that they are not "working hard". For Ashlee, the diversity needs to be happening regardless of how difficult the process may be:

> Diversity and inclusion are very important, and I wish more people thought that way, but I think a lot of the times they think it's like a handout or they think it's anything that's not what it is, basically. But I feel like school is... where most people have a lot of potential to grow and kind of understand or find communities or find things that they didn't know before… I would like them to do that or at least give minority students and outlet or voice to talk to the administration or teachers and voice things that are happening in the school, because, right now, there's really not a comfortable space… for those kinds of opinions to be shared. I think just improving the dialogue between students and adults at the school would definitely be worthwhile and would probably be the first step to bridging the gap between the white portion of the school and minorities

Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory postures that most people are guided by the concurrent and often opposing nature of their social needs, and alter their self-identity accordingly. People do this by engaging in either lowering or raising their supposed individuality through assimilation (i.e., being similar to others, or fitting in) and differentiation (i.e., contrasting from others, or standing out). Students of Color and lower SES students in predominately white middle-class high schools expressed less fulfillment in their desires to stand out within the classroom. This indicates the students whose backgrounds may not match those of

the majority group in the classroom (racial identity, gender, SES background) may experience greater barriers than their majority racial identity and majority SES counterparts (Gray, 2017; Morrison, 2011). Morrison (2011) found ethnic minorities are more likely to speak up in class and express themselves when they feel they have a "psychological standing" (a sense of legitimacy or entitlement), based on their own personal experiences. Conversely, they are less inclined to share their opinions when they feel the opinion may diverge from the majority (Morrison, 2011). Lashbrook (2000) found adolescents' interpretations of peer pressure revolved around shame-related emotions, including feelings of inadequacy, ridicule, and isolation, often due to the fear of abandonment. The looming threat of negative emotions is guided by a person's self-evaluation in relation to others, such as for a student of Color in a predominately white classroom (Lashbrook, 2000). Rhaven reported feeling like she needs to be the face of the race didn't just come from the expectations or assumptions of her white classmates, but also from direct comments from Black peers:

> In this particular year, I was the only Black girl, but there were two Black students in that class. And when anything regarding race or something that, like political, especially right now, it was always looked to me like I supported the entire black community. Which I feel like that's in a normal classroom. You have to carry the whole race on your back. And even one of my friends... I was in his class sophomore year. And I decided to do IB starting junior year, and he was like "Make sure you prove the Black race proud." It's like, even when you're doing something for yourself, it's like your supporting the whole race. So if I do something wrong, they look at that as like "Oh, my gosh." And it's not just those people, it's even your own people. He's like "Make sure you show us right." Even though he's not being a part of it, and that does make it stressful.

As one of the only Black students in the classroom, Ashlee admits she often thinks about how not only she will be perceived, but how she is representing Black people. Being the “face of the race” has been a difficult role for her, as she wants to be outspoken and speak her mind, but “the last thing I want to do is feed into the narrative of like the angry Black woman.” She spoke frequently of having to pick her battles, especially when in disagreements or discussions in the classroom. She spoke of one Black boy in her class who often has controversial opinions, and how it can be very difficult in those situations to figure out her appropriate reaction:

> If I weren't in that setting or weren't in class, of course I would want to argue. But, I don't want to give people the impression that I'm on their side. And this is a kid who like ... He says some very controversial things. A lot of the white people in my classes think that he's racist towards white people. I don't even bridge that discussion with them, because it's pointless. But I don't want to give them the impression that I'm on their side, because I'm not. I'm not on either of their sides, because there are things he says that I'm like, "That's wrong,"

These situations are not just happening with her peers in the classroom. She noted that many of the teachers she has had have seemed hesitant to give her credit, and that adults seem to see more potential in white students than Black students. Even when in the same advanced classes, there have been many times Ashlee has felt as though she is not getting the same recognition and respect as the white students. She’s felt a distinct closeness between the white students and white teachers which has left her feeling like an “other”. Additionally, since getting to high school, Ashlee said there are openly negative conversations about affirmative action, and how it is students of Color who are at fault for a white student not getting into the college they want. It was never a conversation about the student who did not get in, but that it was more of a “I should

have been there, someone else took my spot". Ashlee has incredible insight to how ridiculous of a statement it is, and feels pressured not to address it:

> That's always difficult, because I know that's not the way things work, but I don't know how to explain to people that that's not the way things work, because that's just not a logical thought process. I don't know. I think that is a lot of lack of accountability for like 10 different things. Just the idea that someone who they believe, I guess, is inherently not as smart as them or doesn't work as hard as them ... Because that's always the implication of saying like a Black person took your spot; you're saying that they don't deserve it, even though you don't know the person. It's an ignorant thought in itself.

Akilah supported the idea of a Diversity and Inclusion office in schools. While it feels like a trend or buzzword right now, particularly in higher education. Over the past 50 years, predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have implemented formalized diversity initiatives. This has been due to federal legislation (e.g., 1965 Higher Education Act), the student protests in the 1960s, and the increase of Black students into PWIs. While enhancing campus diversity, the intiatives were established to support students from historically and racially underrepresented populations. (Patton et al., 2019; Patton, 2006; Young, 1986). Unfortunately, often these programs are not offered in high school or elementary school settings, and at the higher education setting the programs are often limited to being focused on a particular subset of diversity, as opposed to considering at the intersectionality of students. There are spaces for Black students, LGBTQ+ students, Latinx/Hispanic students, among others, and not as many spaces for all to come together. Akilah considered limitations and hopes for inclusive and diverse programs:

I think diversity inclusion is a great idea. I think it's like a trend right now, which I can appreciate, but at the same time I think diversity inclusion has a very one-track definition. When people think of diversity inclusion they just think of racial identity or maybe sexual orientation or other things like that that help people identify in our society. But I don't think that's the only thing… as I was saying before I think if you just focus on race and other things like that, that it will actually promote that we're all the same. Not only just people from different races and genders and all that sort of stuff, but people that have diversity in their thought processes. So people that maybe don't think the same as you, or maybe people that don't come from the same place as you, like different backgrounds. I appreciate diversity and inclusion, and the effort that's made there. I just think they should broaden what that means, and not necessarily try to force certain ideas, but have the conversation. I do feel like on college campuses there's just more of "I'm forcing this idea of diversity inclusion down your throat" when for some people... If I'm white and I'm from maybe a small town in Kentucky and I've never seen Black people and now you're telling me about all this stuff and why white people are bad, then I'm going to be confused and I'm going to feel probably attacked. So I don't think forcing it is a good idea. I think just having that conversation and making sure that it's open and it's there is important.

Theme 2: Intersectionality

Kimberle Crenshaw presented intersectionality, an important framework for the identity development of women of Color, in the early 1990s. intersectionality operates within the understanding that “individuals have multiple intertwined identities that are developed, organized, experienced, and responded to within the context of the social structure and its

dis/advantaged ordering" (Potter, 2015, p. 76). These intertwined identities are necessarily "multiple, multiplicative, and inseparable" for everyone (p. 70). In recent years, academia and psychology have paid much greater attention to doing research about human beings who are not white and male. However, much of that research is leading to discussions of women and persons of Color through the negative lenses of stereotypes or "deficit thinking", both in academic literature (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Steele, 1992; S. Walker, 2011), as well as in society generally. The participants in this study shared experiences of being stereotyped by peers and educators. Throughout the shared narratives, deficit thinking was woven through each classroom and interaction with teachers. Additionally, participants in this research spoke about having to code switch and toggle through personas that they have to represent while remaining focused on school and their education. They cannot appear too strong for fear of appearing aggressive, but they also cannot appear weak for fear of appearing inept.

Students of Color are often forced to accept a worldview laden with whiteness in an effort to succeed in the school environment. As the only Black students if not only Black student in their class, the participants often have to put up with what W. E. B. Du Bois refers to as "double consciousness", or the idea that one's experiences, culture, identity and histories are ingrained within the pervasive structure of whiteness, or "Americanness" (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). Du Bois (1903) explains this rather complex duality embedded within the identity of the Black American:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro;

> two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

Settles (2006) offered that: "Theoretically, the intersection of race and gender suggests that there may be particular difficulties that are faced by Black women, due to tensions between being Black and being a woman" (p. 590). Distinguishing from "anti-essentialism" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296), a topic for which women of Color have critiqued white feminism for decades, Crenshaw (1991) suggested instead that, "intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 1296). Essentialism is the notion that all women suffer from the exact same types of oppression, and was and is used by white feminists to further the cause of white, middle- and upper-class women, without bearing in mind the effects of the intersection of multiple identities on the state of being oppressed (hooks, 2013). Essentialism has impacted feminist research generally by offering a mostly one-sided viewpoint of women's oppression. However, in the context of this study, as well as academic research more broadly, the use of an intersectional lens will help with the understanding of the many facets of Black female adolescence, without the assumption that it is exactly like that of white girlhood.

Rhaven considers herself very outspoken and sure of herself, and yet due to the classroom environment, she feels she has to be careful how she presents and what she says, for fear of being stereotyped:

> An event like this arose in my class one day. It was me and this guy, we were having a discussion and we had different views. And he didn't directly throw the angry Black woman card, but he indirectly threw it. And when I got home, I was just like "You know, any time I disagree," and it's usually the same people over and over because you have

> class that day together. And it's like every time I'm trying to speak or I'm not speaking like with a calm voice. It's like, they're always like "Why are you so angry? Why are you so defensive?" You can't express yourself without someone automatically jumping to that opinion. And that's what I thought I was doing. I was like "Well, am I angry?" I wasn't trying to be angry at him, I was just trying to be like "Dude, calm down." Like if he can just see it from a different view, but that made me not want to speak up again in that class. Because I was like I don't want them to think I'm an angry Black woman. I'm actually very nice. But it was just like I don't feel like he's showing me that same respect back. And it seems like every time I talk, he always thinks I'm angry at him. And I'm not angry, you know. I was just probably heated, annoyed, but not angry. So I really do like to watch what I say, but that also sometimes makes me miss what I was going to say because the conversation already progressed. So it's just like finding that balance of thinking but not thinking too much that I don't feel like I'm heard.

For the Black female adolescents in this study, they all acknowledged a balancing act, managing different identities and characteristics in the various worlds they find themselves in, such as their Black community, their own families, predominately white classrooms, around other Black students not in their advanced classes, and other settings.

Paris has found there is a fear to speak up, in case it triggers someone or is upsetting:

> I'd be like, don't say the wrong thing or don't say anything that's going to trigger anyone. So I think, speak up about it, but I'd just be cautious about what I say. I'd have to say it in a certain manner that wouldn't like be directed at any certain person. Right. So you have to pick your words very wisely.

As one of the only Black students in the classroom, Ashlee admits she often thinks about how not only she will be perceived, but how she is representing Black people. Being the "face of the race" has been a difficult role for her, as she wants to be outspoken and speak her mind, but "the last thing I want to do is feed into the narrative of like the angry Black woman." She spoke frequently of having to pick her battles, especially when in disagreements or discussions in the classroom. Alexis and Bryanna have experiences to back up those feelings of discomfort. They've been told they're "the perfect amount of white and ghetto.", that all Black girls are loud, clap with their hands when talking, and are angry and controlling.

Akilah felt there are missed opportunities to discuss racial issues and share feelings about current climates and school belonging with her peers and educators. She remarked it would be beneficial to have conversations in single racial identity groups as well as mixed racial identity groups, because she believes it would allow people to be more aware that racists aren't monoliths. That if students could talk about their experience with racial identity, whether they are Black, white, or Hispanic, or whatever, they'll be able to see that "yes this person is different from you. (I can talk) to a white person who had one experience but I can also talk to this other white person who had a completely different experience and just see each other more as individuals and not just Black people/white people experiences". Akilah wanted students to be able to discuss their individual experiences:

> While race does give you some similarities in life, that doesn't mean that you all grew up the same, you act the same, and past experiences (are the same) but I think it would allow kids to really just see each other as individuals, but also be educated about how the other people in general feel when certain things are said. Or even be aware because you don't

know what you don't know. So, there are a lot of white people who genuinely just don't know, like in the things people of color experience. It's a way of education I would say.

Talking about racial identity can increase feelings of discomfort for some people. Akilah reported she thinks that depends on personal experiences. As far as talking about racism, she has seen it can make white people uncomfortable because when a conversation is opened about racism with white people, they may think that the talk is about them specifically. And Akilah wants it to be known that it is not an attack. "We're not saying you are racist. We're saying racism is a system and it has historically been enforced by white people and it still is." And despite that, white people can still get defensive. Akilah again became animated, about the experience of talking about racial identity with white people for people of Color:

> I think it … gets super emotional when you're talking about history and racism in general because there are people who have had horrible experiences with racism. But, also talking about maybe a part that you've played in it, or how you may be enforced or helped a stereotype or maybe not (doing) the best thing. Like think in the best interest for your race, and when I say that I say that because whatever people of color do, they're usually a representative of their racial identity in whatever aspect they're in. That's not how it should be, but that is how it is. So if a white person is talking to me and they've never really been around Black people before, they might think that all Black people are like me, you know? But that's not the case. That's one thing, just being aware because you don't want to further enforce a negative stereotype. What I find that when white people are asking me question about... that pertain to me or my race, I feel like it's more about the culture. So, the fun part of being a Black person, which is our culture. But I wish they

would ask us about the harder questions or just the things that they don't know. But… I think it makes people uncomfortable.

Ashlee feels she's had a complicated history with being told she "acts white". She struggles with the intersectionality of being white and Black, and said she does not see herself as a white woman. She grew up spending much of her time with white friends, and has been told by classmates, peers, and the Black side of her family that she "acts white":

> I don't really know how to explain it. I view myself as more Black than white, basically. I think part of that is like the whole one drop rule that used to be in existence where people thought even if you were a little bit Black that you were just completely. It's very difficult to feel like a white woman and a Black woman at the same time, because those are like two completely different entities. It's difficult for me to resonate with what whiteness has brought white women in the past and feel like that does anything for me in the present. Of course there is the whole colorism that takes place within the Black community, but I don't think that I'm, in most points in my life, benefiting from any kind of white privilege other than people knowing my mom's white. So, for me, I've always identified more with being Black than being white just because. Just because. I don't really know. I think, especially growing up, I had a lot of white friends because those are the only people I knew. I just kind of hung around those people more, and I think people perceived my behavior and my mannerisms as more white because of that, I guess.

Akilah found many of the comments about her behavior and abilities centered around her "acting white". Starting in middle school, peers and adults would consistently comment that she was "acting white" due to her being smart or because she is well spoken. It caught her off guard, and she said she felt very defensive when people said it:

I was like, "So you think black people are stupid, or they can't speak properly?" It just didn't make sense to me, I'd never heard that. I think that's one thing, not just about Black girls but about black people in general. That, you know, we're not educated, that we can't speak well, that speaking proper English is for some reason only for white people. That was one thing that... that was probably the main thing people said to me in middle school. They would call me Oreo, like black on the outside but white on the inside. I guess the expectation, and the negative stereotype would be that you're supposed to not be able to speak properly, or you're supposed to be loud and "ghetto" and that sort of thing, which is really frustrating. This is bad, but I don't know if I can think of any positive stereotypes for us because pretty much that's less expected.

When she was younger, Aleya did have thoughts and desires to be lighter skinned. She reported middle school was a bit rocky, because she was around more people than in elementary school. And in high school, she felt it was time to find out who she really was, and to radically accept herself:

Okay, this is who I am. I'm not going to change it. I'm old enough to know that this ain't changing. But now it's like, I was told, "Your skin is so beautiful." My parents would always tell me, I'm like, "You all are just telling me that because you're my parents." But I just started realizing it myself, because when you get in high school, if you don't have confidence, people are going to run over you. Because they know when you have it or not. So, now nobody messes with me. Because they know, they know that I'm confident with who I am.

Aleya has found that she “didn't want to be the loud Black girl.” She then started attending her current high school, where “everybody’s Black, basically”. By then, Aleya felt surer of who she is as a Black person, she had more insight and self-reflection.

As one of the only Black students in the classroom, Ashlee admits she often thinks about how not only she will be perceived, but how she is representing Black people. Being the “face of the race” has been a difficult role for her, as she wants to be outspoken and speak her mind, but “the last thing I want to do is feed into the narrative of like the angry Black woman.” She spoke frequently of having to pick her battles, especially when in disagreements or discussions in the classroom. She spoke of one Black boy in her class who often has controversial opinions, and how it can be very difficult in those situations to figure out her appropriate reaction:

> I think a lot of the times I have to pick my battles, because, if I argued with everything that I thought wasn't being properly discussed, then I would never stop arguing. Not that I'm not angry about some things, because I definitely am, but I think it's always going to be viewed as less appropriate for me to be angry than it is for other people. It's always a little bit of an adjustment for me to understand that I can't give either of those parties the wrong impression that I'm agreeing with them, even though I would like to be able to say that… I would like to be able to condemn the stuff he says and not be on their side at the same time, but I'm not really sure that's possible.

These situations are not just happening with her peers in the classroom. She noted that many of the teachers she has had have seemed hesitant to give her credit, and that adults seem to see more potential in white students than Black students. Even when in the same advanced classes, there have been many times Ashlee has felt as though she is not getting the same recognition and respect as the white students. She’s felt a distinct closeness between the white students and white

teachers which has left her feeling like an “other”. Additionally, since getting to high school, Ashlee said there are openly negative conversations about affirmative action, and how it is students of Color who are at fault for a white student not getting into the college they want. It was never a conversation about the student who did not get in, but that it was more of a “I should have been there, someone else took my spot”. Ashlee has incredible insight to how ridiculous of a statement it is, and feels pressured not to address it:

> That's always difficult, because I know that's not the way things work, but I don't know how to explain to people that that's not the way things work, because that's just not a logical thought process. I don't know. I think that is a lot of lack of accountability for like 10 different things. Just the idea that someone who they believe, I guess, is inherently not as smart as them or doesn't work as hard as them ... Because that's always the implication of saying like a Black person took your spot; you're saying that they don't deserve it, even though you don't know the person. It's an ignorant thought in itself.

This intersectionality also fits within multiple category management. Multiple category management discusses how specific psychological structures and processes impact the relationship among multiple social identities. Bodenhausen (2010) recognized three models of multiple category management. The first model is known as dominance (Roccas & Sagiv, 2017). This pattern is characterized by the primacy of one particular identity in affecting perceptions, evaluations, and behaviors toward an individual. From the perspective of the actor, only one category affects how one defines his or her social identity and associated behaviors and attitudes. From the perspective of the perceiver, a pattern of dominance occurs when just one social category often affects how a target is reacted to or evaluated.

The second model of multiple category management is known as compartmentalization and happens when separate, unrelated identities alternate dominating social perception. Frequently, the setting of the situation has a great effect on which identity is likely to dominate how a target individual is perceived. Different situational influences will produce different perceptions of the same individual. For instance, if a Black female student finds herself in a room of Black and white male students, her gender is likely to dominate how she is perceived. If that same Black female student finds herself in a room full of white female students, her racial identity is likely to dominate others' perceptions.

The third model of multiple category management that Bodenhausen identified is called integration, which occurs when an individual's multiple social categories are concurrently observed and combined in some method to create impressions. "Subtyping" and "subgrouping" are instances of an integration model of multiple category management (Crisp & Hewstone, 2006). While these processes are linked, they are different from each other. Subtyping occurs when "disconfirming members of the superordinate group are psychologically 'split off' from the group as a whole" (Crisp & Hewstone, 2006, p. 215). When members of a subordinate group are divided into smaller, more meaningful groups, this is referred to as subgrouping. Crisp & Hewstone (2006) outline five different patterns of integration for social judgment that are dependent on ingroup and outgroup status of the target individual. These different patterns can help to recognize how the participants of this study are being assessed and evaluated in their advanced classes.

The first pattern is additive and occurs when category salience is equivalent. Evaluations are simply made in an additive fashion. This pattern is based on the assumption that ingroups are evaluated more positively than outgroups. Thus, when a perceiver and target share multiple

ingroups, evaluations will be most positive. In this case, white teachers and white students may share multiple ingroups, thus creating the connection the participants of this study recognized of their peers and educators.

On the other hand, when a perceiver and target have multiple outgroups, evaluations will be most negative. For the participants in this study, often they were the only Black girls in the classroom, if not the only Black student. For those targets who have mixed ingroup and outgroup statuses with the perceiver, evaluations will be somewhere in between these extremes.
Next, is the social inclusion pattern which suggests that all groups will be evaluated equally positively as long as there is a common ingroup on at least one category dimension. Conversely, the social exclusion pattern is the opposite of social inclusion. Consequently, mixed targets are assessed as negatively as double outgroups because they are an outgroup on at least one dimension.

Hierarchical rejection is the fourth pattern and specifies that outgroup membership on the more important dimension will determine evaluation. One could postulate this is evident when the Black female students are being stereotyped as “angry” or “loud” when in class discussions with their white peers.

The last pattern is called equivalence and occurs when there are no differences in evaluation across the subgroups. This would be how we would like students and educators to interact with each other, however unless in a vacuum, each person is coming to the interaction with implicit, and possibly explicit, biases. The implications section in the next chapter will discuss how students and educators can be encouraged to be more aware of and address their biases.

Theme 3: Resilience and Strength

Adolescents often create and form their identity based on finding traits and characteristics in adults and peers they want to copy. Unfortunately, much of the research and theory of identity development has been based on the norm of white, euro-centric, North American males (Rotheram-Borus, Dopkins, Sabate, & Lightfoot, 1996), and the theorists themselves are disproportionately white and male (e.g., Erik Erikson, James Marcia, G. Stanley Hall, etc.). To assume all adolescents go through identical developmental processes is impractical. However, when female adolescents began being a part of the research and studied in the 1980s (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991), the norm presented was white, middle-class girls (Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 1996). Recently, as more scholars of Color are being heard, research has proposed that identity formation is fundamentally different for Black girls than it is for others (Clonan Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016; Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, & Foust, 2009; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Beyond the major changes in identity during adolescence, Black girls must also cope and deal with racism and other societal issues (Brittian, 2012) due to the interaction and intersection between racial identity, and gender during a time when their identities are malleable and forming. Black adolescents must acquire a positive sense of self in a society that often reduces them through negative labels and assumptions (Kerpelman et al., 2008). Negative racial identity has been linked to low self-esteem, mental health issues, and poor school outcomes, among other adverse outcomes (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Additionally, identity for Black girls is not an independent sense of functioning. Instead, it is the connection of multiple identity factors, including racial identity and gender. Positive identity is thought to be an extension of self, and engrained in the African American community (Kerpelman et al., 2008). This is considered a protective factor for adolescents, this sense of the African American self. Black children and

adolescents learn that others hold negative perceptions of African Americans. They need parents, peers, and other key players to intervene and explain the basis for these common societal messages, while encouraging their self-expression, and identity creation. If this intervention happens, adolescents are less likely to have negative outcomes and more likely to be resilient in adverse conditions (Kerpelman et al., 2008).

Resilience refers to elements that assist in stopping or slowing down the path from risk to problematic behavior or mental health concerns (Zimmerman Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Resilience is the "ordinary magic" that supports some individuals to positively react and adapt in the face of significant difficulty (Burley et al., 2010; Masten, 2001, p. 235). There are three major components or conditions present for resilience to build or take hold: (1) exposure to threat or risk factors; (2) protective factors that help ameliorate the impact of risk factors; and (3) and the achievement of positive adaptation through competence in various domains (Burley et al., 2010; Luthar et al., 2000; Gonzales, 2011). These three components or conditions have been present in each of the participants lives.

Exposure to Threat or Risk Factors

The Black female adolescents all reported experiencing significant risk factors. These factors include racial discrimination, personal history of traumatic moments, and negative surroundings, namely the predominately white classrooms and schools. Jordyn is a high-achieving, talented student. She's an athlete, excited for college, and very driven. She is also very aware of the cultural climate of the United States and North Carolina specifically. While focusing on her education and future, she is also considering her safety:

> (We) are afraid to speak up, because if they do, then you've got people coming for you, and it's not like we are protected by the police. We are on our own. That's why they're

scared to speak up. That's the thing that really gets to me, both emotionally and in all aspects, honestly. It's because if we can't even trust the police to protect us, how can we protect ourselves? I feel like that's where most of the African-American violence comes from, is because they feel like they can't be protected by the police like Caucasians would be protected by police. So, they have to take extraordinary steps to protect themselves, and that comes with guns and all the violence, I guess that you could say comes with the stereotype that comes with African-Americans. It's really hard. It's really hard, and being in the classroom with the white students, they're just not as interested as I am, which I guess you wouldn't be if you don't really have a connection to it, in any way. But it's still, this is the world, and you're not even phased by it, at all. People are being discriminated against. They don't think, just because they were never discriminated against, so they never had to go through it, it's not a problem, or it shouldn't be talked about, or that it should change. It's always been, to me, especially when I started driving, getting my permit, it's just like, I've always thought, when I get pulled over, make sure that my hands are visible. Make sure that there's no sudden movements, because anything could happen. It's just like, why do I think that way, but the person beside me doesn't because of the difference in skin color? It's kind of something that I just picked up, because I think it's a very hard topic, which still doesn't mean that it shouldn't have been talked about. But just growing up in the society that I'm in now, it's just, it's something that I learned, something that I see, especially all the media and news that's out now. It's kind of hard not to take every precaution to not end up in the same situation.

Beyond the safety concerns outside of the classroom, Jordyn finds herself arguing with her white counterparts in the classroom. Jordyn said she has been so frustrated in some of her

classes, due to the other students not listening and not being open to discussing current events. She tries to be open to what other students have been through, and express herself at the same time. Unfortunately, her lived experience does not match that desire:

> I remember this one day, it was about how African-American football players were kneeling during the national anthem of the NFL games. This one student, we just went back and forth basically the entire class period, and it just kind of gets my blood boiling, because I keep saying ... You don't want to listen. You don't want to understand what I'm trying to say. She's just like, "Well, people are going to the army, and they're fighting for our freedom, and then you're going to kneel and disrespect them." Okay, but they're not doing it because we don't feel free, so why are we going to stand up and honor our freedom, if we don't feel 100% free like the person beside us feels? We're standing up for what we believe in. We're demanding change. It's not so much as we're disrespecting those that fight. We honor those that fight, but we have people that are fighting out there too, and we're still not completely 100% free. Just no matter how many times I tried to break that down or make it simpler, she just still didn't want to learn. She didn't want to understand. She just, she wasn't open to I guess the way that I felt, or whatever. She was just very close-minded and kept her way that she felt. She wasn't like, "Okay. Well, I understand your side, but this is still how I feel." It was like, "This is how I feel, and you're wrong, and that's it."

Akilah reflected on her financial privilege and strong family connection when discussing school discipline, remarking on how different family life may be for students, since educators and peers do not necessarily know what they are going home to. What Akilah has noticed, is that teachers will send Black students to in-school suspension, kick them out of the classroom, or take away

their privileges in the classroom, or some other punitive form of discipline. Akilah said that is not how she would react to the behaviors:

> I would try to talk to them, like see if there's anything wrong. See if there's anything they need. If they feel like they're not understanding the content, or maybe they feel like, "I'm not good enough to be here." So they're just acting out because of that. I would probably just want to get to the root of the problem with the student before I just dismiss them from my class. That's what I would do. Because that's what I see the most and I just don't think it's effective. I'm a strong believer in people are going to act how you treat them. So if you treat them like they are a troublemaker, or you already have that preconceived notion, then that's how they're going to act.

As reported in Chapter II (Literature Review), disciplinary actions are taken for a variety of reasons, and often for Black students the "behavior concern" is more subjective and attitude based. Instead of focusing on education and progressing these students forward, there are seemingly arbitrary rules and regulations that can lead students to believe they are set up to fail. Akilah reported her experience with these rules at her school feel completely race-based. Akilah has felt like all the white girls at her school "pretty much break dress code every day but no one says anything". They are not supposed to wear tank tops, to let midriffs show, to wear short shorts, or wear leggings without their "butts being covered". However, Akilah has seen some of the white students dress like that every day. For Akilah, she believes it a body type issue: "No one says anything, I think it's just because they're smaller, and Black girls just seem to be more shapely. When we wear it, they think it's more of a distraction. That's just what I see."

For Jordyn, all the schools in her county are predominately white. That has led her to feel like an outsider or "other". Starting around fifth grade, she knew she was different from her

classmates, but it did not become a problem until classmates were saying things like "Oh, well he doesn't you, or she doesn't like you, because you're Black," or, "You can't come to my house because my parents don't like people like you." "Well, I can't come to your house because my parents don't like people of your color." Jordyn stated:

> It still continues to this day as a rising senior in high school. I would say it's more of a problem now, just because I'm so engaged in the media and society. As you grow older, it's just social media and just things like ... You're more aware of things that are happening around the world, and you understand more I guess as you grow older, so you get what, I guess the passes that they make that discriminate.

Protective factors

The participants shared their perceptions of their protective factors, the ways they are strong and are able to face negativity. Aleya's concern over teachers' negative perceptions of Black girls is similar to her concern about negative peer perceptions. She voiced her worry about being loud or "ghetto", being seen as unmotivated, blaming her racial identity and gender on not being successful, and other problematic bad attitudes. For some of these negative stereotypes, Aleya reports she sees a positive reframing of the assumptions of Black girls. That if someone perceives the behavior as a negative trait, it looks negative, but if it is approached with positivity, it can be seen as a strength of Black girls:

> They are absolutely positive things, I think it's more positive in our community, not really anybody else. I would say being strong, and not afraid to speak our minds (are positive assumptions) … generally being strong really, because we're able to take a lot. It's not just... I know some people may say, "You're thinking too deep into it." But I think it comes from our past experiences. Even our ancestors, you have to be strong. Yeah, I

think it's just in our nature. I think it's because people get intimidated, that's why it's negative to other people, it's because they get intimidated.

Black history and education were incredibly important topics in Aleya's home. Aleya's father encouraged reading and exploring academic questions. He encouraged her to look up hard copy texts to find answers. Aleya felt her parents prepared her for beyond Black history month, and taught her the history that the educators and classroom were not teaching her: "I would know things that other kids didn't know. Just because of where I came from. So, it really wasn't like they were teaching me something that it didn't know. It was more most of the time I was educating my teachers on things that they didn't know." Her discipline when growing up was to go read a book, and she reports that created and fed into a love of reading over time. Aleya remarked they still have all the books downstairs in their house, "all the encyclopedias and stuff", because her dad likes to keep them close by. As a darker skinned girl, Aleya experienced colorism, or discrimination based on skin color, also referred to as "shadeism". When she was younger, she experienced bullying based on the shade of her skin, and that was when she began realizing the color of her skin:

I was always aware of my color. But it was just knowing, or being educated on it. Wanting to know more. I think I'm more so wanted to know about it. So, I would ask him (her dad) questions, and he would refer me to a book.

Each participant spoke of aspirations and goals for their academic and lifetime careers. The goals the participants described were predominately academic in nature, and focused on the participants' hopes and dreams for their futures. They reported they wanted to attend college, maintain their high GPAs, and excel in their advanced courses. Jordyn reported "I definitely want to be able to go to college, and I want to be able to go to [prestigious research institution]."

Similarly, Alexis stated her major goal is to attend an Ivy League University, or a high ranking HBCU.

Participants discussed their family role models and supportive educators throughout their lives. Parents routinely planned visits to African American History museums, helped with homework and career goals, signing the participants up for activities and extracurriculars in line with their goals. Each participant named a parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, sibling, or cousin who provided reinforcement for goal development. Generally, the participant would observe individuals in their lives, and used knowledge of their experiences to build and work towards their goals. For the Black female students in this study, they also saw how their families experienced racial discrimination and racism, and how they reacted and adapted. For some participants, they would be the first in their family to go to college. For others, they were joining a lineage of doctors and professors. Rhaven spoke of the experiences her grandfather went through, to be the first Black golfer at Tennessee. She told of a story at the golf club where he played and worked, he and some friends want to swim in the swimming pool at the club. The club owners and members were adamant that he not be allowed to be in their pool water. Aleya spoke of her mother, and her experiences with racial identity and gender discrimination in the workplace. The participants heard these stories, and looked for the strength, the fortitude, and determination to move forward despite it all.

A number of the participants discussed their roles in National Honor Society and other volunteer organizations. For these students, volunteering with organizations in which they can give back to their communities and support other students was paramount. Paris spoke of the National Achiever Society, a society exclusively for academically achieving minority students.

Being able to come together with similar students to be able to discuss common concerns and experiences helps her to find peace, while also inspiring her to continue fighting for herself.

Aleya says she was taught by her mother to know when to act certain ways, and know when not to behave certain ways. “There's a time and place for everything.” When Aleya feels she needs to be outspoken, it's because she needs to be:

> I don't think I ever felt any type of way to where I had to tone myself back because I'm very confident in who I am, and what I stand for. When I need to be, like right now, when I need to be professional, I am. Then, when it's time to have fun, I am. When we were at Project Uplift, and we had the SAT stuff going on, it was a time and place to wind down, and not be riled and have fun. But when it was time, of course we were lit. I've never had to tone myself down for anybody. I've learned before, everybody's had a self-identity check before, needing to know who you are. Of course, I don't know who I am completely yet because I haven't grown into my full self yet. But- when I was younger and in middle school, that was kind of my time where I was like okay, who am I? But now, I'm just me.

Achievement of Positive Adaptation

Every participant has shown an incredible display of achieving positive adaptation. Despite often being the only Black student in the class or the only Black female in the class, having to experience direct and indirect racial comments, and negative stereotypes, these Black women have fought for every win they’ve had. Ashlee discussed how being the “face of the race” during her class discussions is frustrating, and she fears reinforcing a stereotype about Black people or Black women. And yet, she continues to show up, voice her opinion, and educate her classmates on her expertise. Naya discussed how her white teachers don’t understand

the struggle of being a Black teenage girl, and that there are not many people in the school that she can relate to, and she notices when she does not get the same treatment white students do. Positively adapting, she wants to create a space in which "there shouldn't be favorites". Aleya stated she sees these moments in the classroom and school, and "I don't really look at it as a struggle. I just look at it more as a learning experience."

Volunteering and supporting her community are incredibly important to Akilah. She volunteers with an organization called Jack and Jill of America, which is a national organization for Black families. They do community service and recreational activities. It's about fellowship and giving back to the community. Akilah is very active in that organization, she does it for the majority of the year and as it is for Black families, she reported she is "with Black people at that time." The other association she works with is called Young Black Leadership Alliance (YBLA). In this organization, there is a Young Black Men's side and a Young Black Women's side. Akilah's cohort is ten Black girls, and in her Brother cohort there are ten Black boys. Those two organizations are how she spends most of her time. Finding these organizations and getting involved is not an easy task, for example Akilah said Jack and Jill is "honestly just about who you know". Her mother's close friend joined and was able to invite Akilah's family in. Akilah said to be accepted in, you have to know someone who is already in it. YBLA used to exclusively be for young Black men. For the first ten years, it was for young Black men and Akilah's uncle was on the board. When the organization created the Young Black Women's side and then merged to become Young Black Leadership Alliance, Akilah became interested. Her sister did it and Akilah felt inspired and encouraged to be a part of it.

While money and time is being invested in supportive programs for students, the majority of these programs are being created to support young Black men. And, for Akilah, that leads to feelings of Black women being forgotten:

> Something that I wish there was more of is support for Black girls. I think in society, when people say Black people it is automatically that we're talking about Black men, and so in that sense I think Black women can often be forgotten. I wish people talked about that more. I wish there was a way that we felt like we could be seen more. I feel like in general Black women can be forgotten, not only within society but also within our community as well because like I said I feel like Black women are always on the front lines, always defending Black people. But support us. We're human too. That's like a historical thing. Black women are supposed to be the matriarchs and the people that take care of everybody. I think it's important that we realize we should take care of ourselves too. I appreciate them trying to invest in Black boys, because I'm not going to sit up here and say that they don't need it because they do. But we're here too. That's all I'm saying.

Within the Black community, Aleya remarked that colorism within her racial identity is a struggle, and centering education as the path towards forward momentum:

> Dark skin, light skin, … I feel like by us doing that to each other, it makes white people think that they can do it to us. Because they see us doing it to each other. It makes them believe that they can do to us. And then, I'll just say politically, economically, being educated really feels like the hardest part… to get across with any situation. it's just the hardest thing to get around. Because people don't understand how much of an impact the people before you had on you. And how what you're doing has an impact on the other people coming after you. So, simple things like voting, I take that really seriously

because in order for you to have a part... Or not even that, because just this past election which is trash. But I just feel like you should still vote because you need to be educated.

Aleya felt strongly about her college choices and where she would like to see herself. She's been leaning towards a historically Black college and/or university (HBCU). She reported she wants to go to an HBCU because:

> It's not like I don't know what it's like to be a minority. Because yeah. Because I know some people are like, "Well, if you go to HBCU, then you're not going to get the real-life view on things." I already have enough of that. I think I just want to be around my people. I have the rest of my life to be a minority, and I would like to be a part of the majority for as long as I can.

In terms of support and strong role models, Aleya discussed her mother, and the way to be a strong Black woman. Aleya brought up how much harder a Black woman has to work at a job, but less of a financial payoff they receive than their counterparts:

> I wouldn't say life is hard every day, because that would just be dramatic. But I think it is. For instance, my mom she had worked at a... I think she had an IT project, something like that. At her corporate center, she had been working there longer than another girl who had got the promotion that she should have got. I think they said she needed to work on her leadership skills or something. But I know my mom, and she's very outspoken, she's very professional. I get it from her. She's taught me a lot about being a Black woman and not everything is going to be handed to you. So, I don't really look at it as more like a struggle. I just look at it as me being a Black woman in America, who has to work two times harder than somebody who's in the same position as me. Sometimes it's not a bad thing because most of the time, you get more knowledge and understanding on things

than the person that doesn't work twice as hard as you. So, you have more experience than the other person. So, I don't really look at it as a struggle. I just look at it more as a learning experience.

Jordyn's mom attended an HBCU, and recently took Jordyn on a tour there. The environment, the culture: "Just the environment was just so overwhelming. It was mind-blowing. It was just an experience I will never forget. Ever since then, it's just like, 'This is where I want to be. This is going to be my home.' But it's just like, love who you are despite what everybody else says about you." Jordyn says her mom has been crucial in her growth in her self-esteem. She's taught Jordyn over the years:

> It doesn't matter what skin color you are. I've been taught to love everybody despite their skin color, so it's just like, love yourself as well. You don't have to feel lesser or feel like you're not worthy, I guess you could say, because of the color of your skin. Even if I feel discriminated against, and I come home upset or whatever, it's just like, you are who you are. You can't change it. You just have to accept the fact and move on. You have to be better than them, I guess you could say.

North Carolina has created a School Mental Health Initiative, to create a continuum of supports and services, make services sustainable, and to engage stakeholders in the process. Currently, mental health services across NC schools are fragmented, reactive, or non-existent. In 2016, the Initiative found that in the United States, the annual prevalence of any mental health disorder for students 8-15 years old was a little over thirteen percent. In North Carolina, it was nineteen percent. Encouraging students to discuss their mental health with school counselors openly is difficult, and increasingly more difficult when the school counselors are white, and the students of Color are from communities that do not necessarily "believe in" mental health

concerns or counseling. Similar to adults, Black youth are less likely to use mental health services than white youth (Breland-Noble, 2004; Caldwell, Assari, Breland-Noble, 2016). Akilah discussed her own struggles with mental health, and the barriers to accessing school counselors:

> I would say I'm a very high achieving student. I have high expectations for myself. In junior year, I was like, "Whoa." This might sound a little stuck up but that was the first time I actually had to try in school. That was the first-time school was hard for me. When I got to junior year, it was just me navigating that because I wasn't getting the grades that I was used to getting. I just felt like a failure basically, and some of my teachers were just like, "Oh, you know an 80 something is not that bad. There's no reason for you to be upset." I'm just like, "You don't know how I feel as far as the expectations I've set for myself." So in that case I think they were a little bit dismissive, like they're saying it's not that bad, but okay but it's bad for me. It's bad for what I expect for myself. I feel like they were probably trying to be like, "Oh don't be so hard on yourself." But it didn't feel that way. I don't, actually I don't know anyone that talks to their counselor about mental health. Personally, at school, I've never brought it up except for this past year because I just finished my junior year, and junior year is just hell. It was awful. I think even if you don't want people to see it at school, people can see it. Like if you're tired or you're just stressed or struggling. I think some of my teachers were a little, not saying that they weren't encouraging, but sometimes they were dismissive of how I was feeling.

Akilah additionally had thoughts on mental health and the Black community. She reported she feels the Black community is getting away from the thought of mental health being taboo. She feels in the past, people were not as supportive, and did not want to talk about those types of

concerns. Akilah positions that it's important to realize that there are resources available, and it's important to take advantage of that. She went on to say:

> I think Black mental health is probably not taken as seriously because we just don't want to talk about it. I think that one if there was more access, and two if there were people in are more open to talking about it. Because I think while mental health is a big thing right now, it's still not completely de stigmatized, if that makes sense? I think if it wasn't taboo or weird to have to go talk to somebody about how you were struggling mentally, then I think a lot more people would take advantage of it. But you know you've got to have the resources first.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an examination of the themes related to Black female adolescents' academic experiences in the North Carolina school system. The shared narratives of these participants were investigated, and the themes and sub-themes from these interviews were explored using Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory lenses. The stories shared throughout the chapter, combined with the themes to connect and organize the data shine a light on the context and intricacies associated with racialized academic experiences in the North Carolina school system.

In Chapter VI, I will provide an overview of the study's main goals as they relate to the specific research questions. I will also discuss the study limitations, suggest implications for future research, and provide implications for policies and practices of key players and individuals involved in Black female adolescents' lives.

Chapter VI: Discussion, Implications

Restating the Research Purpose

In this study, I have sought to identify how the academic experiences of Black female adolescents in the North Carolina school system are shaped by their racial identity, the racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization messages they receive, and their levels of school connectedness. The following research questions guided this study and connected the use of Critical Whiteness Studies, Critical Race Theory, and the overarching purpose of the study:

1. **How do Black girls in high school describe their experiences with racism in the education system?**
2. **Where do Black girls in high school see gaps within and barriers to services and support?**
3. **What spaces and structures in schools support Black girls' agency and aptitude?**
4. **What protective factors and strengths do they feel they possess?**

Racism and racial discrimination are firmly embedded in every structure of the United States society, from the institutional, political, and social levels to the psychological level (Brown & Tylka, 2011). It is probable that minority youth will experience some form of racial discrimination during their lifetime. Fisher et al. (2000) found that Black adolescents are more likely to experience racial discrimination than any other ethnic minority group. Additionally, one of the first places that youth of Color are likely to become aware of the salience of their racial identity and experience racism is in the school (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Consistent

with Wong and colleagues' (2003) research, nearly all of the Black girls in the study discussed experiencing or perceiving racism and racial discrimination in situations at their respective schools, many as early as kindergarten.

Analyses of each individual narrative indicated that the majority of the Black girls in the study maintained a strong Black racial identity indicative of their high racial centrality (believing their Blackness to be an important part of their identity) and private regard (expressing their contentment with their Black racial identity). However, many of the girls maintained a low public regard as a result of the many negative stereotypes about Black people they had been exposed to at school, including being told they're being an "angry Black woman" or "too loud". Those who established a positive Black racial identity appeared to be better prepared to, if not confront, then address and identify racism and racial discrimination they faced in the school environment. They maintained a positive, determined outlook, and were able to continue with a strong sense of self, despite their awareness of the negative stereotypes often believed about Black people and Black women in particular. This was, at times, difficult, as these stereotypes and beliefs were coming from not only their white peers, but also their Black peers, and at times their teachers. By sustaining a healthy racial identity, these girls appeared to be able to continue with their academic success by using those negative stereotypes and biases as an incentive to prove "them" wrong by persevering, working hard, and achieving academically. Many of the students in this study wondered what would have happened if they had not worked so hard, or if other Black female students had been able to fight against the stereotypes and barriers put in place to keep them down. Several mentioned their white peers did not appear to have to struggle or fight so hard for their place in the advanced and honors classes.

As evidenced in the stories in Chapter V, many of the Black girls were prepared with racial socialization messages that centered on racial pride, combatting stereotypes, preparation for bias by working harder, and striving for personal excellence. Many of the stories presented in Chapter V show that these Black girls were prepared to combat stereotypes and ignore or fight biases by working hard and striving for personal excellence. Additionally, a common source of the positive racial socialization came from the girls' parents, who indirectly encouraged the strong self-identity in the girls by influencing their racial, gendered, and academic self. For many, at least one parent consistently prepared their daughters for the racism and racial discrimination they were most likely to encounter, both at school and in the community and workplace. The parent(s) did this by sharing their own personal stories of experiencing racism or racial bias, sharing stories from their youth or during adulthood (e.g., in the workplace or when dealing with the students' teachers and school), and did their best to fact check the myth that Black people are loud, angry, and less intelligent or lower than their white counterparts.

This connection and message provided by the parent(s), and sometimes a Black educator or school personnel, strongly helped many of the Black girls in this study to work hard to prove their white teachers and peers wrong, by doing their best with and excelling in their continued enrollment in rigorous advanced and honor courses, despite the barriers and obstacles they faced, including the interactions and relationship with peers and teachers, and the absence of culturally relevant academic curriculum which focuses on the positive narratives of people of Color and, in particular, Black women. The Black girls in this study were provided these positive messages about their racial and cultural identities in a variety of ways. Some parents shared stories of strength of ancestors and family members. Others planned regular trips to African-American history museums, while others encouraged extensive reading and studying the texts about Black

history and culture. This allowed the Black girls to maintain a positive racial identity, and allowed them to develop a more positive sense of self and racial pride. This is notable in the learning environments they are in as well as grade level. These girls were often judged and discouraged as a result of their racial identity, gender, and course rigor, at a time when, as adolescents, they are learning about themselves and imprinting the messages they receive about who they are. Adolescence is generally when the foundation of a sense of self is being set, and much of a student's future is built upon that foundation.

Additionally, due to the positive messages parent(s) and supportive adults provided to these Black girls, not only do they not see their racial identity as a hindrance to success, but they also do not see their gender as a hindrance. Many of the girls are aware of the male-dominated society, and their attempt to place discriminating restrictions on all things those who identify as female do and have, including behaviors, occupations, income, and education. One participant in particular shared that she had to switch schools after a male student attacked her, and the school did not do enough to keep her safe after the incident.

These students in the study have received the message that they are and can continue to be strong, independent, and successful Black women, free to follow the interests of their choosing. Each participant in this study expressed their belief that education is essential, and had plans for schooling after high school and a career goal in mind after they earn their Bachelor's degree or, for some, graduate school. They wanted to continue to excel academically and find an environment that would encourage their growth. Several discussed career goals in fields in which predominately white men hold jobs. They leaned towards STEM subjects and had carefully considered financial, academic, and emotional considerations when thinking about their futures.

When Black female adolescents are able to connect with and develop close relationships with peers, educators, school counselors, and school personnel, they are able to increase the level of school connectedness as well as improving their overall academic experience. Each student in this study was able to name the teacher who taught them the "real" Black history, if a teacher has done that for them yet. When they had access to culturally relevant and honest curricula, and were provided with perspectives of marginalized groups beyond the traditional, Eurocentric history lessons, the Black female students felt a stronger connection to their class and their own history and identity.

Analyses of each Black girls interview data suggest that Black girls feel most connected to their school environments and thrive in academic settings when they: 1) are able to see the worth in the curriculum being taught, particularly when it is culturally relevant to their lives as People of Color, or Black females; 2) work with teachers and school counselors who are anti-racist in their message as well as providing culturally relevant support and care; 3) develop close relationships with both their same racial identity and non-same-racial identity peers, teachers and/or school counselors.

Alternatively, there was a strong disconnect and at times repulsion for these Black girls regarding their schools, classrooms, and teachers. This distaste generally came about when the Black girls experienced the teacher bias due to their racial identity and/or gender, when they believed their teachers or administrative staff did not have high expectations for them, when they did not feel supported academically or emotionally by teachers and counselors, and/or when they were not taught culturally relevant and competent lessons. For the Black girls who experienced most if not all of those factors, they generally leaned more towards applying for and attending an

HBCU over a PWI for their college career, stating they want a chance to not be in the minority, to be accepted for who they are and surrounded by those who understand them.

Implications

For Black female adolescents to achieve health identities and succeed in the educational environments in which they navigate daily, they must have a positive perception of their self. Parents, teachers, school personnel, support staff, and peers are significant factors in influencing Black female adolescents' negative or positive sense of self, through the daily interactions they take part in and the messages they receive. Viewing this population through a lens of critical whiteness and critical race feminism can create a genuine opportunity for the restructuring of power, resources, and social mobility. This can be done at educational institutions through anti-racism and/or implicit bias training (Harper & Davis, 2016; Saad, 2020), for example, which helps dominant and non-dominant groups identify biases they hold and challenge them, and determine actions they can take to promote healthy ways to engage with each other. To promote a greater sense of belonging for Black female students, educators need to be prepared to "see" their students as individuals with lived experiences that are valuable to the classroom. This will increase the likelihood of persisting and graduating for these students (Howard & Hamilton, 2003). If educators are committed to social justice, they need to address the lenses through which they see their Black students, in addition to providing the recognition, acknowledgement, and validation the Black female students require in order to be as successful as possible. Additionally, these students are inevitably going to experience racism, sexism, and racial discrimination as they advance in their education and careers, and it is important that, regardless of others' perceptions of and attitudes towards them, that they are encouraged to maintain a strong sense of pride in who they are. For these students to create healthy identities in school and

beyond, the influential others they communicate with daily must be actively involved in providing support and responding to their needs and concerns with empathy and care. Additionally, there needs to be an effort towards redistribution of power, resources, and social mobility (Collins, 1986). For Black women, there are limited opportunities to be recipients of this. Therefore, it is paramount they find opportunities to connect with others, and for educators and policymakers to address the redistribution. Below, I offer additional recommendations:

Student Development

The students in this study were heavily involved in student organizations and honors societies. They have been doing the work to promote change for themselves and for the student body at large; their work to promote equity benefits everyone, not just themselves. The North Carolina school system would do well to acknowledge their contributions to this work. Further, institutions could make good-faith efforts to confirm there is equity when providing financial and organizational support to student organizations which are focused on the concerns of the Black community and other minoritized groups. The acknowledgement of the work the Black female students are contributing could not only appreciate the students for taking on the work, but could also stimulate positive change on each campus. Some of the ways to show support include:

- Encourage Black female students to participate in already created leadership opportunities.
- Encourage the participation in dominant spaces, such as roles as school ambassadors where they could interact with their communities on behalf of the institution.
- Identify them as formal mentors to students in elementary and middle schools, to acknowledge they have much to share with younger students. Mentees would not need to be Black girls; however, this could create additional relationships and support

for the younger Black girls, creating more opportunity for the younger students as well as the Black female adolescents.

- Be deliberate about recognizing their contributions to the campus community when they participate in resistance work and community building efforts, even if they are seemingly opposite to the procedures of the school. In such cases, engage them in conversation about how to improve practices at their school.

Faculty and Staff Development

The participants repeatedly mentioned the lack of Black faculty and staff at their schools. While institutions are experiencing challenges with hiring and retaining Black teachers (Benitez et al., 2016), these students felt they could better relate to Black teachers, particularly Black female teachers. Ways for the North Carolina school system to be more impactful in the engagement of Black faculty include:

- Close racial and gender gaps in the school system by recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining more Black female teachers and staff. Research has found all students, not just students of color, benefit from having more educators of Color (Umbach, 2016). Additionally, hiring more and diverse school and college counselors will allow for building meaningful relationships and greater connection and interaction by decreasing the student to counselor ratio. The additional counselors will allow for more visibility and accessibility to students whom they are assigned to counsel, and support students who have mental health needs.
- Engage and reward Black female educators to act as formal mentors for these students, giving them credit for this work, in financial, title, or promotional avenues.

- When hired, all educators, staff and administration should be required to have training on cultural competence, implicit bias, and anti-racist pedagogy. The stereotypes and preconceived notions that Black girls face in school settings and predominately white spaces may come from a collective lack of knowledge and understanding. It is important that students also partake in training and education of this nature. These trainings and lessons will not only bring awareness of the Black female perspective, but also other cultures that are represented in the educational system.

Teacher Education Programs

Teacher education programs play an important role in preparing preservice teachers for the difficult situations they will likely face in the classroom. While it is unquestionably different and not a substitute for the reality of the work itself, teacher education curricula can be curated to prepare teachers for their increasingly diverse classrooms by considering the following:

- Challenge preservice teachers to address and confront their implicit biases, stereotypes, and deficit thinking throughout their education and career span, and work to remind these preservice teachers of the power their perceptions and expectations will have on their future students' academic achievement or failure.
- Pursue, recruit, and retain more preservice teachers of color.
- Engage preservice teachers in the study of culturally diverse student populations; students with disabilities and exceptionalities and their unique learning needs; multicultural education; critical theory and critical pedagogies, including critical whiteness studies; culturally relevant teaching practices; and social justice education. These courses will encourage preservice teachers to question traditional teaching practices and how they may or may not be equitable for all students.

- Adjust their curriculum to include approaches to teaching the ever growing racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse population of students in the United States education system. This includes including courses on more than specific subject area methods or classroom management strategies, going beyond the Eurocentric and white norm.
- Preservice teachers should be given the ability to spend a significant amount of time in community engagement activities that will have them work directly with families who are culturally and economically diverse. This will allow them to potentially gain a new perspective of the marginalized groups upon which they may have initially harbored negative feelings and beliefs. Steps should be taken to ensure these opportunities are not being viewed through a "white savior" lens; that it is not an occasion to instill Eurocentric norms and ideals on these communities. It is instead, a chance to learn and listen.

Educators, School Counselors, Psychologists, Personnel and Staff

It is easy to understand the pervasion of racism in the institutional structures of the United States, from the legal system, the church, the medicine sector, and the military, to the education system given the historical legacy of enslaving Africans for free labor, seizing Indigenous peoples' lands, and forcing Native American children to assimilate through the use of boarding schools away from their native lands and families. Due to the nature of this unsettling problem in a land often revered by people all over the world for its rhetoric of freedom, equality, and democracy for all, educational policymakers and key players must work enthusiastically to reform both teacher education programs and education policies that disadvantage marginalized students in the classroom. Specifically, teachers must acknowledge and examine their upbringing and stereotypes that portray people of Color and economically disadvantaged people in a

negative light. These personal biases may have influenced their interactions with culturally different students in their classroom. These biases may lead them to perpetuate attitudes and behaviors that limit the academic achievement and social engagement of students of color, low-income students, and potentially students from certain genders. It is imperative they not only maintain high expectations for all of their students by rejecting all deficit thinking models they may have assumed based on racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes, but also confront and dismantle these internalized attitudes. Educators and administration must find new ways to engage all of their students in an equitable learning environment. The responsibility is on teachers to support all students in feeling comfortable in their classes. Many of the Black female students in the study noted that they experienced racial and gender discrimination, directly or perpetuated by the teachers and their classmates in school and the classroom. The purpose of the education system is the academic experience, which was jeopardized for these students due to these experiences. Teachers must hold themselves liable for creating and maintaining an atmosphere of safety for all students in the classroom. Some of the approaches educators and school personnel and staff can implement include:

- Culturally relevant educational practices that center on cultural diversity and the contributions of communities of Color are essential to the learning needs of many culturally different learners. Many students of Color have had to navigate educational environments that overlook the "non-white" perspective while focusing on the dominant Eurocentric ideology, both in school curriculum and classroom management styles.

- Teachers should be encouraged to think of best practices in fostering a democratic classroom environment that encourages new voices, new knowledges and experiences into the classroom discourse.
- Teachers should also be encouraged to adopt an empathetic stance and work to develop a stronger relationship with the parents of minority students in their classrooms and learn about the communities in which their students of Color are living. This can be accomplished through community and home visits to further understand the students' social, emotional, and psychological needs from a systems perspective.
- Teachers must make a stand about respect for diverse views being expressed in the classroom, but not tolerate racism and sexism. This statement should be placed in the course syllabus, stated aloud in class, and regularly revisited.
- Educators must acknowledge student's concerns when they bring them up in the classroom or privately with the teacher. Students in this study were discouraged when teachers seemed "hesitant" or "scared" to address or acknowledge when the students experienced microaggressions in the classroom. Classroom discussions must be managed to provide space to safely counter racist and sexist views and use them as teaching moments. This would also include ensuring the voices of different students are heard throughout the class discussion and lesson, and do not make the minoritized student the "face of the race" or "voice" for their particular group or groups (Harper & Davis, 2016).
- School counselors, psychologists, administrators, and other school personnel and support staff must also address their deficit thinking practices, confronting their

biases, and learning more about the communities and families that the students are coming from, keeping in mind the social, emotional, psychological, and educational needs of the students.

- School counselors must also work to regularly connect with students about their academic goals, encouraging underachieving students who have the ability to do the work toward academic success by suggesting opportunities to participate in more academically rigorous courses (instead of regularly suggesting lower level tracks) and assist students in activities and organizations at school that will allow them to gain social capital and leadership skills, while promoting equity and diversity.
- School and college counselors must remain aware of their strategic approaches to distributing important resources about deadlines and guides for completing the FASFA and scholarship applications that students may be eligible for, as well as financial aid, scholarship, and grant opportunities that will help economically disadvantaged students pay for SAT and ACT testing preparation courses, college admissions testing fees, and college application fees, among others.

Parents

Parents of Black girls can work both individually and collectively to encourage racial and cultural socialization opportunities that promote racial pride, moral understanding, and cultural awareness. Opportunities for growth include:

- Consistent exposure to new learning activities has the potential to increase Black female adolescents' opportunities for higher education attainment and social mobility in the future.

- Reframing traditional masculine qualities, such as self-reliance as opposed to dependence, and assertiveness rather than passiveness, they can prepare their daughters for situations where they will not necessarily have anything handed to them.
- Fostering both a healthy racial identity and a resilient spirit can inspire them to work hard to achieve their goals without the assistance of or praise from others—men, or otherwise.
- Black female adolescents will internalize both the implicit and explicit messages when positive racial and academic concepts are routinely exposed through achievement-centered parent-child discussion, activities, and interaction in the home, the environment which plays the most vital role in their identity development. These lessons can be framed as protective factors that continue their healthy racial, gendered, academic, and social identities and decrease the chances of underachievement in response to racial discrimination or accusations of "acting white" by peers and others with which they interact.

Research Significance and Contributions

This study focused on the education experiences of Black female adolescents in the North Carolina school system. This study contributes to the limited body of research on Black female students, which on its own is significant since much of the existing research on Black students focuses on Black men, or compares Black women to other groups (i.e., Black men or white women). It addressed intersectionality, racial identity, and the balance between invisibility and visibility. As Black women, these students are deemed less likely to achieve than their peers who were white and attending predominately white advanced classes. The experiences of the students

in this study highlight the need to understand how members of this population navigate the spaces that they perceived as unwelcoming and hostile while at the same time being ignored and disregarded.

Primarily the study and its findings are important because they show how these Black female students navigate their predominately white classes at a time when they are developing their self-identity. The intersectional perspective used for this study was imperative, as it allowed for consideration of the multiple identities of the students and how they mutually influenced each other. Additionally, the use of intersectionality allowed for the stories of these students to be told without being situated against white women or being seen in a support role to Black men (Patton et al, 2016). Social justice in education requires that policymakers and educators listen to the lived experiences of Black women and learn how they can be better supported on their educational journeys and set up to succeed. These students possessed a drive to excel that routinely was tested and questioned. Policymakers and educators would be remiss to not focus on how to best support these students to break down the unnecessary and superfluous barriers and gaps these students have to battle.

The notion of invisibility provided an important line of examination in this research (Fordham, 1993). Fordham (1993) problematizes "loudness", using it as a metaphor for Black women claiming their existence, power, and space. However, this study illuminated how these Black female students navigated their classrooms utilizing loudness, silence, visibility, and invisibility. This study shows that deciding between loudness and silence, visibility and invisibility, can be seen as an act of emotional, physical, and/or academic self-preservation. Gender was not discussed as prominently as racial identity, except to note that life as a Black woman is much harder for anyone of any other racial identity and/or gender. Racial identity

figured more prominently, as noted by participants that they felt much of the burden related to their identity was a result of their Blackness rather than the gender, or how gender and racial identity influenced each other and intersected.

Limitations

I took several steps to ensure the conceptual and methodological rigor of my dissertation, however there are several limitations. While there are other physical spaces that Black female adolescents are excluded from that are predominately white, in this study I only focused on predominately white schools in North Carolina. I have no theoretical or empirical reason to believe that professionals that choose to pursue teaching have the same motivations, backgrounds, and personal ideologies as other professionals. Therefore, this project does not account for what quantitative researchers call "selection effects" (Hill & Rosenman, 2013). By focusing specifically on Black female adolescents in predominately white schools, this project does not have a way to account for the variables unique to those students, and not necessarily standardized and generalizable to Black students who spend time in other predominately white spaces.

As far as school environments, predominately white schools are not all the same. To the extent that white schools impact the way the Black female students understand, make meaning of, and discuss their racial identity, this study is limited because it only examined the effect on these girls in their respective school settings. This dissertation cannot answer the questions of how Black students in predominately Black schools or with predominately Black teachers would make sense of their racial identity and racialized experiences?

My dissertation has several conceptual limitations that directly affected the administration of my in-depth interviews. In conceiving this research project, everything from

the research questions to research design was influenced by what I and the broader research literature termed whiteness. While I aimed for a Critical Race lens, as a white woman who has only experienced being white, no amount of Critical Race framework can "fix" my lens. While bringing racialized terms to my interviews, focusing heavily on racial identity and using racial identity and whiteness in my interviews may have been methodologically inappropriate. Depending on how the students conceptualized my questions, they may have skewed their responses to fit a preconceived notion of racial identity and whiteness. That is, by using these terms when conducting the interviews, I may have unwittingly influenced the responses given by my participants.

With only nine participants I was limited with what conclusions I could draw about the Black female student experience in North Carolina. Additionally, these students were in advanced, honors classes with familial support and a lack of disciplinary action in the form of suspensions, detentions, or expulsions. Additionally, I relied on the accounts of participants, which may be limiting. A stronger study warrants more direct observations in addition to interviews. I may have missed key aspects of participants' experiences. Observational research would have offered a more thorough examination of the educational and classroom environment that is not filtered through the perspectives of these students.

Suggestions for Future Research

The lack of literature on Black girls in the education system is what prompted this study. In contextualizing the findings within the critical whiteness framework, future research possibilities emerged, and they parallel directly to this study's limitations. First, my findings come from a small number of high achieving Black female adolescents in North Carolina. It would be useful for future research to look at wider variety of school districts in North Carolina,

as well as extending to different parts of the country. Additionally, nonwhite racial variations need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the impact of white racial identity. Lastly, pertaining to schools, future work needs to consider the socioeconomic differences in different school districts.

Other professions beyond education should be considered as well. Each setting may present their own unique set of challenges, however white social workers that primarily serve people of color, white police officers working in underserved communities, and white professors who teach teaching courses, all could be worthwhile research endeavors. While those listed professions may not adequately account for socioeconomic variation, selection effects, or any existing power differentials that exist, they still have the potential to be theoretically and substantively significant. Also, there are many professional and casual spaces that are also racialized spaces. Critical whiteness studies should consider scholarly attention to white people who spend significant amounts of time with people of color.

Additional research should be conducted to explore faculty perceptions. Those studies may find exploring teacher perceptions as well as their teaching approaches may produce useful data for strategies to help educators who perceive students of Color as having deficits. Studies have shown an association between class size and course subject with participants' perceptions of faculty fostering a supportive and nurturing learning environment, or not (Beghetto, & Kaufman, 2010; Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Faculty may use more impersonal teaching methods, or fall back on Eurocentric classroom management styles when they teach larger classes.

Finally, critical whiteness research should focus on the methodological limitations that currently exist in the field as a whole. The majority of critical whiteness research has been

qualitative, historical, philosophical, or narratively constructed, present research included. More quantitative research will increase the strong historical and narrative-based critical whiteness literature. Within qualitative methods, future research studies could benefit from utilizing ethnographic and participant observations to take critical whiteness literature in an empirically-rich direction.

Conclusion

Using counter-storytelling and qualitative inquiry, this research investigated the ways in which Black female adolescents' experience the North Carolina school system and the impact of racial identity and gender as evidenced by their respective counternarratives. The unique stories of this group confirm the rampant racism and sexism that continues to persist in the United States' schools, particularly those predominately white institutions. The unique, previously untold stories these students shared provide useful data for policymakers, educators, counselors, and psychologists. My goal with this research, is that this study will enlighten future research to examine the systemic issues that exclude and oppress students of color, particularly Black female students, who endure marginalization in education as a result of defective education policies and procedures, deficit thinking, educator bias, and lack of effective diversity training. When educators, policymakers, and other school personnel begin to question their personal agendas and subjective beliefs, and work to change their thinking, we will be able to decrease the underachievement of Black students and provide a more equitable schooling experience. For Black female students, it will take stakeholders and key actors in the education system to foster healthy connections and belonging in order to facilitate successful outcomes at school and beyond.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

To: Alan Brown, David Churchill, Calvin Groves
School of Education Deans Office

CC: Mary Dooley, Rune Simeonsson, Robert Martinez

From: UNC IT Security
Date: 5/31/2019

RE: Notice of Study Approval by the IRB with the Data Security Level of Level II
Study #: 19-0206

Study Title: Unheard and Unseen: Black Girls in The North Carolina school system
PI: Mary Dooley

The Institutional Review Board has finalized its review of this study. Based on information the Investigator provided, **this study meets the criteria for Level II data security requirements.**

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Data Security Guide: https://research.unc.edu/files/2017/05/Updated-DSL-Notification.pdf
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Level II Data Security Requirements:
Based on the information the PI provided in the IRB application, this study will be collecting sensitive data that require additional security measures to ensure that they are adequately protected from inadvertent disclosure. Due to the nature of these data, the PI is required to implement the following security measures on any computer(s) that will store or access information collected for this study. The PI should coordinate efforts in this area with the unit's IT data security personnel receiving this email.

<u>Required Measures for Level II Data Security</u>

1. Access to study data must be protected by a username and password that meets the complexity and change management requirements of a UNC ONYEN.
2. Study data that are accessible over a network connection must be accessed from within a secure network (i.e., from on campus or via a VPN connection).
3. Computers storing or accessing study data must have Endpoint Protection (AntiVirus/AntiSpyware) installed and updated regularly where technologically feasible.
4. Patch management and system administration best practices should be followed at all times on systems storing or accessing your data.

5. Users should be granted the lowest necessary level of access to data in accordance with ITS Security's Standards and Practices for Storing or Processing Sensitive Data (when technologically feasible).

**These requirements do not replace or supersede any security plans or procedures required by granting agencies or sponsors. Questions or concerns about compliance with these requirements should be directed to the administering department's IT support staff.

Additional IT Security Resources

- ITS Security
- Carolina Population Center Security Guidelines
- SOM Information Security
- ITS Research Computing

Due to the nature of this research study, the senior IT official in the administering department is receiving this email about the study and may contact the PI or technical contact(s) to discuss any data security questions on concerns they may have. If the PI has indicated that the research will take place in another unit on campus (i.e., a Center or Institute), that group will also be notified.

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR MINOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Parental Permission for a Minor Child to Participate in a Research Study

Consent Form Version Date: 5/29/2019
IRB Study # 19-0206
Title of Study: Unheard and Unseen: Black Girls in The North Carolina school system
Principal Investigator: Mary Dooley
Principal Investigator Department: School of Education Deans Office
Principal Investigator Phone number:
Principal Investigator Email Address:
Faculty Advisor: Rune Simeonsson
Faculty Advisor Contact Information:
Study Contact Telephone Number:
Study Contact Email:

This is a research study to explore the experiences and perspectives of Black female students in the North Carolina school system. Your child expressed interest in participating in this research study.

Participants will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes during the summer before their senior year of High School. Participants will be asked about their experiences in the classroom, the schools in general, and their educational communities.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.
If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue to read below. If you provide consent for your child to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return to Mary Dooley at (email) as soon as possible.

What are some general things you and your child should know about research studies?

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may decide to not allow your child to participate, or you may withdraw your permission for your child to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Even if you give your permission, your child can decide not to be in the study or to leave the study early.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. Your child may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you and your child understand this information so that you and your child can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You and your child should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how racism and zero-tolerance policies in school settings have impacted female students of color living in urban and rural environments. The students may experience blatant or subtle racism, systemically imposed or directly expressed to the student, throughout their lives. When the policies and practices of the education system and criminal justice system intersect in this way, female students of color are disproportionately primed for prison instead of completing high school and moving on to college and/or career. This qualitative research will be designed to provide Black girls the ability to explore their environment and highlight their experiences, as well as provide myself the opportunity to observe and reflect with them during this process. Sharing the final results and any recommendations for policy or practice adjustments for the educational community is a final step for this project. The participants will be adolescent Black female students.

How many people will take part in this study?

There will be approximately 8-16 people in this research study.

How long will your child's part in this study last?

If you agree to allow your child to participate, I will meet with your child one time for approximately an hour during the summer before her senior year. If there is a need for follow-up, that will take place at a mutually available time before October 2019. Any data collected and all transcripts will be saved in a confidential manner for up to 5 years, and then destroyed.

What will happen if your child takes part in the study?

As a participant, your child will have the opportunity to work with the interviewer who will use audio and video-recorded face-to-face semi-structured interviews to obtain details of your child's lived experiences during the programming. I will also take field notes and journal to accurately capture our interaction. Your child will also have the option of skipping questions, returning to questions, and stop answering questions at any time of the study. You also have the option to decide not to have your child be in the study, and you can stop if you do not want them to do it, at any time; including being audio and video-recorded.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. Your child will not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks. There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

What if we learn about new findings or information during the study?
You and your child will be given any new information gained during the course of the study that might affect your willingness to continue your child's participation in the study.

Will I receive any study results?
If you would like to receive the final version of the study or just the results section, the researcher can send that information to you when completed.

How will information about your child be protected?
Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. We may use de-identified data from this study in future research without additional consent. In order to reduce risks, the researcher plans to keep your child's information private by using pseudonyms, storage of their vital and personal information in a locked storage in the researcher's office on UNC-Chapel Hill campus, transcribing data on a password-protected desktop computer, and eliminating references from the text of the study that would identify your child.

Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your child's information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. Any recordings will be saved on the researcher's UNC OneDrive in a confidential and private manner. Recordings will be kept for up to five years and then destroyed. Participants can request at any time to stop audio and video recording.

Check the line that best matches your choice:
_____ OK to audio record my child during the study

_____ Not OK to audio record my child during the study
OK to video record my child during the study

Not OK to video record my child during the study

What if you or your child wants to stop before your child's part in the study is complete?
You can withdraw your child from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigators also have the right to stop your child's participation at any time. This could be because your child has had an unexpected reaction, or has failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

Will your child receive anything for being in this study?
Neither you nor your child will receive anything for being in this study.

Will it cost you anything for your child to be in this study?
It will not cost anything to be in this study.

What if you or your child has questions about this study?
You and your child have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If there are questions about the study (including payments), complaints, concerns, or if a research-related injury occurs, contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form**.**

What if there are questions about your child's rights as a research participant?
All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your child's rights and welfare. If there are questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Parent's Agreement:
I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily give permission to allow my child to participate in this research study.

_____
Printed Name of Research Participant (child)

_____ _____
Signature of Parent Date

_____
Printed Name of Parent

_____ _____
Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Permission Date

_____
Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Permission

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How would you describe your race and ethnicity?
2. When was the first time you became aware of race or ethnicity?
3. When was the first time you remember feeling different, excluded, singled out because of your apparent race or ethnicity?
4. What sort of things, positive or negative, did you learn about your race and ethnicity growing up?
5. Would you say that you feel a strong attachment to your ethnic or racial group?
6. Would you say that you have a lot of pride in your ethnic group and its accomplishments?
7. Would you say that you are active in groups that include mostly members of your own ethnic group?
8. Would you say that you have a strong sense of belonging to your ethnic group?
9. Would you say that you think a lot about how life is affected by your group membership?
10. Would you say that you have often talked to others about issues related to your ethnic group?
11. How much of your free time do you spend with people of your own racial/ethnic group?
12. What is the ethnic/racial environment in your school?
13. How comfortable do you feel at school as a black woman?
14. Have you experienced racism at school? In the classroom?
15. What is your attitude towards white teachers? White administrators?
16. Have you experienced racism in your relationship with your teachers?
17. Have you ever had a black teacher and if so, what was your reaction?

18. If you had a black teacher, would it help you? What would it mean to have a black teacher?
19. What are some ways schools could improve the class/school environment?
20. Have you ever received detention or a disciplinary action? How do you feel when you get detention or a disciplinary action?
21. Would giving students the opportunity to discuss racial issues and share feelings in a single race and multi-racial group reduce racial tension and promote a more successful school experience for all students?
22. If you were teacher, what would be some ways you would change the class?
23. Recall all of your experiences at your predominantly White school. Can you recall any specific experiences where you felt you were mistreated because of your race by anyone at your school?
24. Recall all of your experiences at your predominantly White school. Can you recall any specific experiences where you felt you were mistreated because of your gender by anyone at your school?
25. How important is your Blackness to you?
26. What are some of the negative things you hear about Black people? Where have you heard these things? How do you respond to these assertions?
27. What are some of the negative things you hear about Black females? Where have you heard these things? How do you respond to these assertions?
28. What important values have your parents instilled in you? How do you believe these values prepare you for the future?

29. What messages, if any, have your parents communicated to you that have helped (or will help) you to deal with racism and/or racial discrimination?
30. What messages, if any, have your parents communicated to you that have helped (or will help) you to deal with sexism?
31. Tell me about the messages that your parents have communicated to you about education. How have these messages prepared you for the classes you currently take and the school you currently attend? How have they influenced your academic performance? In your opinion, how will these messages prepare you for life success in the future?
32. What do you believe your parents' dreams and visions are for your future?
33. Think back across your entire K-12 school career. Who was your favorite teacher, and why? What is/was it about this particular teacher that makes them stand out among all of the others? Did you share a personal relationship with this teacher? How did this teacher interact with you and treat you on a daily basis?
34. Think back across your entire K-12 school. Who was your least favorite teacher, and why? What qualities did this teacher possess that made you dislike them? How did this teacher interact with you and treat you on a daily basis?
35. What qualities do you believe a "good" teacher must possess? Based on the qualities you listed, do you have any "good" teachers this year?
36. Describe a time when you felt your teacher devalued you and/or didn't believe in your abilities.
37. Tell me about a time when you felt your teacher was proud of you academically.

38. Have you ever felt isolated from your friends at school? If so, why? Please share that experience with me. Do you feel that these feelings of isolation had anything to do with your race or gender? Why or why not?
39. Has there ever been a time when you've been among a group of peers at school (whether they were friends, acquaintances, or classroom peers) when you felt you just didn't belong? Do you feel that these feelings of not belonging had anything to do with your race or gender? Why or why not?
40. Tell me more about the relationships you share with same-race peers at your school and in your community (e.g., church, neighborhood, community organizations, etc.).Have any of these peers ever accused you of "acting White"? If so, tell me more about that experience? How did it make you feel? How did you cope with the accusation? How do you think the experience affected you: (a) mentally or emotionally? (b) socially? and/or (c) academically?
41. Do you find the content taught in your courses meaningful and/or relevant to your life as a Black female? Why or why not?
42. How rigorous are your advanced classes? Do you feel challenged? Do you ever feel bored? Tell me why.
43. If your close friend who is also a Black female received a referral to advanced classes next year and wanted you to describe what the experience is like, what would you tell her?
44. What challenges, if any, do you face in your advanced classes? In what ways do you think your motivation to achieve and academic performance are impacted by these challenges?

45. What activities, if any, are you involved in at school? Describe your role(s) and the people you work closely with.
46. In your school community, do you believe that it is important to be involved in school activities offered at school? Why or why not?
47. What is implicit bias?
48. How is implicit bias different from racism?
49. How does implicit bias lead to discrimination like racism?
50. What's an example of implicit bias that you have experienced, witnessed or heard about?
51. Describe your understanding of diversity and inclusion, and why it is important to schools.
52. What is your definition of diversity and how or why do you think diversity is important?
53. In what ways do you think diversity is important to a student in North Carolina?
54. How are diversity/inclusion issues and education related?
55. How would you describe your current thinking about diversity, and how has your thinking changed over time?
56. What does it mean for you for schools to have a commitment to diversity? How have you seen schools demonstrate that commitment, and how would you like to see schools demonstrating it?
57. What are some concerns you have about schools focusing on working with diverse populations or communities?
58. To what extent do you believe there are significant differences in how schools should work with diverse cultures within the US/US minorities and diverse cultures from other nations? Are different strategies appropriate, and if so, what are they?

59. The hard part of talking about race/racism is …

60. The beneficial part of talking about race/racism is …

61. What questions do you wish people asked?

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